

Discovering communities of social e-learning practice

Teaching and Professional Development Fellowship Report 2009/2010

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Acknowledgements

My Thanks go to:

All of the staff and students who took precious time to complete questionnaires and other requests for information.

The participants, who so kindly agreed to take part in the case study – a special thanks to all of you for your time and effort, I have learnt a lot this year and a great deal of that is down to you, I literally couldn't have done it without you!

Neil Cummings, Chris Follows, Julia Gaimster, Jonathan Kearney, Paul Lowe, Jo Morrison, Nancy Turner and Geoff Thomas-Shaw.

Ellen Sims and Lucy Renton for your kind support throughout the project.

Nigel Bents, Alan Graham and Robin Jenkins for welcome distractions.

A special thank-you to Eva Verhoeven for love, support and proof-reading.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The fellowship proposal: background

This fellowship proposal builds on previous CLIP CETL funded pedagogic research. The research sought to explore how blogs¹ could be used to enhance teaching and learning in graphic design communication through encouraging reflective practice and autonomous, self-directed learning while also developing an increased sense of community in learners.

The research was able to connect inherent properties in social media², with socio-constructivist pedagogy to evidence *reflective dialogue* (Brockbank and McGill, 1998) and an enhanced sense of collective engagement within a *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998) & Wenger McDermott and Snyder, (2002).

This research was invaluable in enhancing my practice and I was keen to develop it further. Through the research I became aware of colleagues, across the constituent colleges that make up the University of the Arts London, that were carrying out similar approaches to developing reflective practice and communities of practice in learners using social media. I felt that one way I could continue to develop my practice outside of funded research would be to share experience and knowledge with them more informally. At the time of writing the fellowship application however there was no formal structure or system to facilitate this. The fellowship therefore offered an opportunity to both engage with colleagues across the institution who shared similar pedagogic research interests and, through this activity, to consider the possibility of a more formal structure or system for exchange through a community of shared practice, to explore what it could do and what functions it might undertake.

1.2 The fellowship proposal: update

Discoveries made during the fellowship have necessitated a re-focusing and re-shaping of the original proposal as the scope of the report has become more focused through the research findings. The focus of the original report was to discover practitioners and practices that sought to develop *reflective practice* through e-learning implementations, but since reflective practice was not the only kind of learning evidenced through the study, it was no longer appropriate as its sole focus. Instead, the report seeks to highlight a broader range of learning resulting from the implementation of social media in a range of learning and teaching contexts.

1.3 The fellowship report: aims

The revised aims for the fellowship are therefore:

¹ A **blog** is an abbreviation of weblog. A weblog is an online journal. allows visitors to the site to leave comments on what has been written. Blogs are part of a collection of online tools called *social media*.

² **Social media** are, very simply put, online digital media tools, based on web 2.0 ideologies and technologies that promote social interaction. (adapted from Wikipedia)

- to identify examples of the use of social media to enhance teaching and learning and assessment. (For the purpose of the report this will now be described as *social e-learning*)
- to generate a case study to evidence good practice in social e-learning through transformative activity.

And finally:

- to develop considerations for the development of a community of practice in social e-learning

2.0 Context

2.1 Macro context

Since its inception around 2004, social media has had a significant impact on the way we live and work. It has expanded the possibilities for social interaction and community forming through the use of social-networking tools like Facebook. Tools such as blogs enable the creation and presentation of ‘user-generated content’ in a range of media, including text, image, audio and video, causing us to question the value of classifications such as amateur, enthusiast and expert. The ability for specialist and non-specialist audiences to engage in dialogue on such content through tagging, linking and commenting offers new approaches to the validation of knowledge. Developments like wikis and the invention of *Creative Commons Licensing*³ allow the creation of cultural content through collaboration and cross-disciplinary processes by changing the conceptions and structures of authorship and ownership. Meanwhile file-sharing sites have caused disruption to pre-existing commercial models of content production, distribution and consumption leading to a reconsideration of definitions of value and exchange.

The fact that so many of these activities relate closely to activities within the fields of cultural and creative production, communication, information and knowledge creation demonstrates their significance for both art and design practice and higher education. There are implications for the way knowledge in teaching learning and research is created, shared and validated. There are both potential issues and benefits for the way the institution engages with its learners at all stages, *before* recruitment, *during* the period of study from induction to graduation and, more significantly, *after* they have graduated.

The JISC funded report ‘Thriving in the 21st century: Learning Literacies for the Digital Age’ (the *LLiDA* report, Beetham, McGill, Littlejohn, 2009) set out to review the change in the contexts of learning, including the nature of work, knowledge, social life and citizenship, communications media and other technologies. It suggests that universities need to prepare students for, amongst other things; a ‘networked society and communities’, the blurring boundaries between ‘real and virtual’, ‘public and private’, the ‘increasing availability and re-usability of digital assets’ and ‘rapid social and techno-social change’. (*LLiDA*, 2009:3)

³ **Creative Commons (CC)** is a non-profit organisation that has released several copyright-licenses known as Creative Commons licenses free of charge to the public. These licenses allow creators to stipulate which rights they reserve, and which rights they waive. (adapted from wikipedia)

The report recognises that students need to learn through active learning in a situated context. Furthermore it suggests that developing the capabilities to deal with the eventualities laid out above is “best supported in ‘communities of practice’, ‘communities of inquiry’, or ‘learning groups’ focused on tasks of value and interest to the learner.” (LLiDA, 2009:3). And finally it recommends that “students’ digital and learning literacies need to be assessed and supported as they engage in academic tasks, and they need to be equipped with the habits – including reflection and peer group support – that will allow them to improve their learning strategies throughout life.” (LLiDA, 2009:5).

The recommendation is therefore, that students need to have the opportunity to develop digital literacies in a situated context and be encouraged to use digital technologies within communities of shared interest and enquiry through the learning and teaching activities they encounter as well as through subject or course specific practice. This poses a challenge within education because it requires an ongoing, reflective and transformative approach to considering how learning, teaching and research are carried out to meet these needs.

The complexity and pace of change within social media, even at a technical and practical level, can make it difficult to fully understand even for staff with extensive experience of using and thinking about digital technologies. For staff with less experience that want to enhance their practice to deal with this challenge the issue is compounded because it is not always easy to know how, or where, to start or who to ask for help.

It is surely logical to suggest however, that the same techniques recommended by the LLiDA report for developing digital literacies in students, will work for learners at all levels. Active learning that is situated in context and builds on shared knowledge within a community of practice is a credible and transferable model. In discussing the contexts for the creation of communities of practice, Etienne Wenger states:

Appreciating the collective nature of knowledge is especially important in an age when almost every field changes too much, too fast for individuals to master. Today’s complex problem solving requires multiple perspectives. The days of Leonardo Da Vinci are over. (Wenger McDermott and Snyder, 2002:10)

2.2 Micro context

When the London Institute was formed in 1988, a number of art and design colleges from across the capital were brought together into a single entity. Each of these colleges has a significant reputation for being at the forefront of teaching, research and practice across the spectrum of art and design. Combining the individual strengths and reputations of the colleges with the overarching benefits that this togetherness can bring has been an ongoing process since then.

In the past it may have been that the geographically dispersed nature of the colleges was a barrier to achieving this aim of mutually beneficial and meaningful collaboration and participation. In recent years however, significant and valuable progress has been made in the development of communities of shared interest across the university. Such communities offer the benefit of developing fields of enquiry through

bringing together knowledge and experience from across colleges, while maintaining and, in fact, building on the identities and reputations of those individual colleges.

As an example, the Information Environments Research Unit⁴ is able to facilitate the development of both its individual members and the group as a whole by offering opportunities for collaborative, interdisciplinary and cross-college activity and participation in knowledge creation and dissemination through funded team research projects, conferences, journals and other publications. Internal activity and participation is encouraged at all levels, including academic and technical staff, and doctoral, graduate and under-graduate students, while external participation is encouraged through national and international communities across education and industry. The visibility of individual activity is enhanced through participation in, and support from, the group as a whole. In turn the group is also enhanced through the activity of its individual members. In the current economic context, the importance of working together in this way to the mutual benefit of the individual and the organisation is more pertinent than ever in order to remain at the forefront of art and design education and research in an increasingly competitive global climate.

2.3 Context Summary

To summarise then, our ways of production, consumption, distribution and communication have irrevocably changed through the digital technologies of social media and the new ways of working that they promote. Learners and teachers need to find a way of dealing with this change in order to remain at the forefront of their practice and the education institution is tasked to think about how it can develop knowledge creation and distribution structures in order to facilitate this.

The University of the Arts London (UAL) is not alone in having economic challenges to meet alongside the challenges presented by the wider context described. As suggested by Etienne Wengers' theories and as evidenced through the example of an existing community of practice, working together in an organised and aligned way may offer a credible model towards meeting these challenges.

This report therefore seeks to analyse and evaluate some of the current learning, teaching and research activities, which make use of social media through aligned design and implementation, to demonstrate how some of the challenges outlined in the context for this report are already being met. It then seeks to evaluate further emerging themes and topics to consider how the development of a community of shared enquiry within this field of practice could help in continuing to meet them in the future.

3.0 Methods

In order to identify potential participants for the case study, an initial review was conducted to gauge the range of recent and current activity in e-learning across the UAL. The range of activities conducted in order to collect data for the review is described in section 3.1. At this stage the definition of what constituted e-learning activity was purposely broad and in keeping with the acknowledgement, in the HEFCE revised e-learning strategy 'Enhancing learning and teaching through the use of technology' (2009), that:

⁴ <http://www.informationenvironments.org.uk/>

It is widely recognised that there is a great diversity of uses of ICT [Information and Communication Technology]. New and emerging technologies clearly provide exciting opportunities for enhancement and innovation in learning opportunities on the campus, within the workplace or at home. It is therefore appropriate [...] to focus on the broader opportunities offered through the use of technology, rather than concentrating on issues such as distance learning.

From the results of the review, several examples of activity were identified within the definition of social-e-learning. From these examples, individuals were invited to participate that reflected a broad range of activity in a range of contexts and these are outlined in section 3.2. Finally the methods employed to conduct the case study are described in section 3.3.

3.1 Cross-university e-learning review

In order to focus report activity and to identify participants for the case study, a cross-university review of e-learning activity was carried out. Data for the review was collected through:

- a questionnaire emailed to all staff,
- a questionnaire to all staff currently undertaking the PGCert in LTAD,
- a review of available literature and documentation both printed and online,
- a review of college sites accessible through the UAL portal,
- a review of course sites online and
- discussions with staff including: colleagues, stakeholders and members of various relevant staff groups such as; The Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CLIP CETL), The Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design (CLTAD), the E-Learning Strategy Group (ELSG) and Academic Support.)

The framework of the fellowship prevented a more exhaustive review and it is acknowledged that not all activity was able to be collected for a number of reasons including obvious time pressures on staff, preventing their participation despite a willingness to do so. But overall, a significant amount of activity was uncovered describing a range of e-learning implementations. Findings from the review are briefly analysed in the report outcomes in section 4.

3.2 Considerations for inviting participants for the case study

The intention when inviting participants to take part in the case study was to reflect activity:

- from across the constituent colleges of the UAL
- from a range of subject disciplines in art and design
- from a range of practitioners: academic staff, technical staff and students
- using a range of social media tools
- that demonstrate a range of learning situations (e.g. blended/distance learning)
- prompted by a range of motivations and situations, e.g. facilitating live public projects or enhancing links with external communities

3.3 Case Study Methods

Participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The resulting transcripts were then analysed using a variety of iterative approaches to elicit emerging themes. 'Inspiration' software was used, for example, in order to carry out a visual mapping of the interview data to facilitate the discovery of emerging themes through visual linking and cross-referencing. Topics under which evidence could be presented were suggested both through the interviews and in relation to strategic documents such as HEFCE's revised strategy for e-learning (2009) and the JISC funded LLiDA report (2009.) The transcripts were then analysed again to allow a more focused evaluation to take place. All participants in the case study have consented to be named in this report and as of 01.11.10 all participants have consented to their representation within the report.

4.0 Outcomes

A brief overview of the findings from the review is presented in section 4.1. These indicate a range of activity in e-learning, many of which fit the reports definition of social e-learning (See 1.3, the fellowship report: aims). From the findings, participants were approached to take part in the generation of a case study. There were several considerations that supported the invitation of the participants for the case study (see section 3.2).

The five topics devised for detailed discussion are outlined below and are evidenced and illustrated through quotes from the transcripts, they are:

- 4.2.1. Transforming roles of the teacher and learner through social media
- 4.2.2. Transforming the curriculum through social media
- 4.2.3. Transforming assessment through social media
- 4.2.4. Expanding the boundaries across time and space through social media
- 4.2.5. Developing digital literacies through social media

The first three topics (4.2.1 to 4.2.3) are considered important to include in the report in line with the HEFCE revised e-learning strategy, which states:

...our belief [is] that the focus should be on the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment, and how technology might be able to support that focus. (HEFCE, 2009:5)

Later they also state that it was felt that in their revised approach to e-learning they felt that:

A bolder, more visionary approach was called for: one that reflected the transformative potential of technology, recognised changing student needs and expectations, and emphasised connections between higher education and the workplace. (HEFCE, 2009:5)

And later :

... there is an opportunity for institutions to engage further with technologies with the intention of supporting learners in building knowledge collaboratively and engaging in social learning. (HEFCE, 2009:6)

The fourth topic, 4.2.4 therefore looks at how social media can transform teaching and learning by extending it beyond the boundaries of the institution to intersect and interconnect with legitimate wider communities of practice, for example, industry.

The fifth topic looks at *Digital Literacies*, one of the main themes addressed by the JISC LLiDA report, (2009). The significance of this topic for initial discussion here is, as the findings of the report suggests, that:

... learning and digital literacies are rarely the basis of an integrated institutional strategy. Effective integration can be provided where the Learning and Teaching Strategy addresses learning in the digital age directly. (LLiDA report, 2009:5)

And later:

There was also very little mention of communicating and sharing ideas either as an aspect of information literacy or in its own right. Effective learners require both of these, and other digital capabilities such as navigating virtual and immersive worlds, managing digital identities and reputation, and using digital technologies for reflecting, planning and making sense of their learning experiences. (LLiDA report, 2009:6)

Following a short summary of the findings, the final section 4.4, uses a number of the emerging themes from the transcripts to generate topics that suggest activity that could be undertaken by a community of practice in social e-learning.

4.1 Cross-university e-learning review: findings

The review identified 43 examples of e-learning implementations by staff, with some aimed at purely staff use and others by both staff and students. Of these there were 34 examples of the use of social media to enhance learning and teaching.

- 14 were using or had used blogs
- 10 were using or had used wikis
(Included in these are three examples that used both blogs *and* wikis)
- 5 were using or had used custom designed social tools
- 3 were using or had used podcasts
- 1 example used web-conferencing
- 1 example used online 3D virtual environments

Of the others, there were three examples that were using or had used standard websites and the remainder are undefined or unclassifiable.

The value of a more in depth analysis of the review is debatable, because it is difficult to gauge the full range of activity within the scope of the report. What is of interest

however is how the implementations have come about. The survey suggests that a significant amount of valuable work in technology-enhanced learning is encouraged, supported and promoted through staff development opportunities such as:

- the undertaking of an action research project conducted through the Post-graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Art, Design and Communication
- support from CLIP CETL, through funding and resources, including fellowships, secondments, pedagogic research funding, staff rewards and presentation of findings at conferences
- support from CLTAD through funding or resources

One final indication worth noting from the evidence of the review is that there is (through the number of examples of the use of social media identified in the review), a large enough interest to support a range of participation in a community of practice around social e-learning.

From the review eight members of staff were approached and agreed to participate in the case study: Julia Gaimster, Jo Morrison, Chris Follows, Jonathan Kearney, Paul Lowe, Geoff Thomas Shaw, Neil Cummings and Nancy Turner. This equates to one staff member each from the London College of Fashion, Central St Martins College of Art and Design, Wimbledon College of Art, Camberwell College of Arts and the London College of Communication, with two from Chelsea College of Art and Design and one from CLTAD.

The subject fields represented include: Fashion and Textiles, Graphic Design Communication, Photojournalism, Fine Art and Digital Arts, plus implementations designed specifically to promote inter and cross-disciplinary practice, collaboration and communication across the UAL and wider communities.

The range of social media practices represented includes: the use of blogs, wikis, as well as other social media applications (including two examples of custom tools designed at the UAL for specific purposes). Examples are implemented in blended and/or online approaches to course delivery.

The evidence contained in the interview transcripts is both rich and deep and as such some of it remains outside the scope and framework of this report. Readers are therefore urged to read the individual interview transcripts included in the appendix to reveal further points of interest beyond those discussed here.

4.2 Case Study Findings

4.2.1. Transforming roles of the teacher and learner through social media

Shreeve and Sims, (2006) discuss how the application of socio-constructivist pedagogic practice in art and design education has the potential to develop the roles of learner and teacher engagement, they state:

In socio-cultural theories of learning, the role of the expert is conceptualized as one of facilitator, enabler and co-learner (i.e. a reflective tutor/practitioner). Shreeve and Sims (2006:5).

There are several clear examples in the evidence of this changing role being achieved through social media implementations. Indeed, the inherent nature and underlying structure of social networking tools encourage this change in hierarchies in a range of contexts, as Neil Cummings states:

One thing that the wiki does challenge, along with other software of this kind, is the traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge and where that knowledge resides. It's true that in the seminars knowledge and experience exists as much in the students as it does in me - the person who convenes the seminar.

Neil then describes his experience of the way the wiki transformed traditional roles:

...the wiki became this very fluid space, where who was influencing who, who was teaching who, and what kind of knowledge was being shared or exchanged, became very vivid and vital.

From the discussion with Neil about the development of the *Chelseawiki*, it is clear that the questioning of hierarchies was part of the intended learning within the subject field. There is evidence that students and staff were able to take on the role of facilitator, teacher, enabler and learner at different times as appropriate. Earlier in the interview he describes the events that led to the tools' development, which again demonstrates how roles were changed:

I gave a series of lectures and a seminar series – called something like Free Culture, introducing some ideas around Free, Libre or Open Source Software (FLOSS) and how this might impact on how art might be practiced and organised. In the seminar we decided to set up a wiki, [one of the students] was familiar with the Mediawiki which he set up on his server [...] He instructed all of us in how to edit a wiki. It was a really exciting seminar, we were all learning together.

Paul Lowe also demonstrates how social media tools can encourage an understanding that everybody is learning together:

...it's a sort of virtual commons or what Jay Cross would call a Learnscape, a series of overlapping spaces in which the group – and I use that term loosely – it's the participants in the program, it's the staff, it's any ancillary people, it's the external people who come in, the ALs, the lecturers, the students, where we can all come together and collaboratively discuss practice and work on enhancing pretty much everybody's practice really mine as much as theirs really...

Later, Paul describes how a tool (Google Wave) was researched and implemented by students to help with mind mapping and he goes on to describe the transformed learning that resulted from this:

...it started off where they would post their idea and wait for the tutor to validate the idea and then other people would then start to interact as well. But it was still very much based on the tutor verifying the concept. [...] What has happened really quite quickly, within weeks of

starting to use it, is that the bulk of the validation now is peer to peer and the tutors voice gets progressively less and less.

Jonathan Kearney discusses how the wiki encourages student participation and responsibility in meeting the needs of the curriculum:

...with the wiki there is the principal of it being open, you know, they can edit it, they can change it and everything gets organised through it. The front page for the news stuff, the students edit that, they just keep adding more and more stuff. If we see something, we'll add it as well, but the students pretty well run that completely. [...] The wiki has become the most effective way for the whole lot to collaborate together.

Jo Morrison, through her intervention discovered the need for new roles and skills for the teacher through social media engagement:

I'd never been a facilitator, or even like an e-moderator [...] I used Gilly Salmon's work on e-moderation and the five steps, what you can expect as an e-moderator, and she saw five different stages of development for the learner. [...] First it's the familiarity with the tools and making sure that you welcome everyone straight away, so I did that kind of thing, you know, "Hi, great to see you" to get people to use and become familiar with the technology. I really did use up to about stage three, at which point I thought "Well they really have become their own groups now [...] they are learning with each other, and they are getting out of the site what they need from it."

4.2.2. Transforming the curriculum through social media

Through the participatory and inclusive nature of social media, certain aspects of teaching and learning practice like curriculum, which traditionally has been seen as fixed can become more fluid, with students taking an active role in what is learnt and how it is delivered. A more recent development such as the *Open Educational Resource* (OER) offers peers the chance to literally share and build on their practice within the community. As Jonathan Kearney says:

So the actual tools we are using can re-shape what we are doing, the way we are teaching but also the content, I think that's the thing, it isn't a style thing, its challenging what is learning and I find that very interesting, exciting and encouraging. It's absolutely not forgetting what has gone on in the past, but it's building on that and saying, but this now gives us a new possibility here, so lets go and explore that and see what happens.

Geoff Thomas-Shaw identifies how students are able to take ownership of their learning on the final year of the BA Graphic Design Communication course at Chelsea:

...the students do not feel that doing the blog is an ancillary part of doing the project, it is the project.

Paul Lowe uses the term *living curriculum* to describe the process of ongoing reflective dialogue that takes place between the learning community in order to ensure the continued currency and appropriacy of their activities for learning and the resources they are using to carry them out:

So what I think we have tried to engage in is a kind of design for evolution I suppose, like a living curriculum, so we are constantly looking at what we are doing, how we are doing it, why we are doing it and how we might enhance and improve that. And we are very much doing that in consultation with the students, because again, we are taking this adaptation or interpretation of Wenger's Community of Practice (COP) idea and trying to make that work within an academic space.

And:

I wouldn't like to say that is absolutely scalable and that it would work for everybody, but certainly for us and I think that what it does is it does two things. One I think it validates what we are doing, the sense that what we are getting is very intimate and we are getting continuous student feedback, and they are quite vociferous about that, so if things aren't going well then they will let us know about it and visa versa. But secondly I think it gives the students that sense of control and empowerment. What begins to happen, and I think it is exactly what you want to happen, is that idea of legitimate participation...

He also demonstrates why this ongoing transformative approach to curriculum development is important when things can change so quickly:

...there is a five year validation process and the things that I am using to teach my course today didn't even exist five years ago, you know, Youtube, web conferencing, Twitter, they didn't exist, you know and I cant imagine teaching without them now, but five years ago when we wrote the document they didn't exist, so who knows what will be in place in five years time.

As discussed in the context to this report, Social Media allows for the sharing and re-purposing of content, as Neil Cummings discusses in his interview:

...so these texts developed on the wiki plus we started to post all the bibliographies. Then I realised I could also put my lecture notes on the site and students, if they wrote their essays or theses on subjects that were somehow related, could link these to the lectures and vice versa. Then students began to edit and add to the lectures, I could incorporate these additions into future iterations...

Nancy Turner describes the possibilities afforded by the *Open Education Resource* currently being developed at CLTAD having just received funding:

...you can put your documents in there, you can put a context in there, this is how and why it was used and that kind of a thing, so a bit of a narrative with it, and then individuals can access them, you can put a varying level of access and copyright on them and then others can access them, repurpose them, add to them and then upload them back to the environment so that there can be a history and a progression of a tool used in varying contexts and varying purposes and so there's a kind of collaborative community building component to it as well.

4.2.3. Transforming assessment through social media

Social media encourage sharing, collaboration and inter/cross-disciplinary practice. Communities of practice are built on the mutual benefit gained from working together. In teaching and learning contexts, while curriculum promotes active learning in context and learning outcomes can promote collaboration and teamwork, assessment can still tend to favour individual endeavor and effort. There is an increasingly apparent conflict too, between assessment processes and the more informal kind of validation familiar with social media. As Paul Lowe states:

...this whole issue around assessment is really troublesome, its troublesome knowledge because all of your instinct is guiding you towards wanting to get the student to understand what is good and what is bad themselves and to generate that meaning for themselves and yet almost everything we do externally validates that judgment rather than internally validates it and I think it's a very tricky thing to take on board...

He goes on to describe the friction between innovative learning and teaching and assessment:

...if you are going to innovate something ... it's like dominoes, you know, you bring in this innovation but there is a cascade off that and lots of other things start to occur, so: you introduce a collaborative learning exercise in a wiki, but then you have to think, 'well, now how am I going to assess that?'

Students working collaboratively in fine art faced this problem, as Neil Cummings recounts when asked why students chose to use a wiki:

Because it fitted many of the things we were talking about in the seminar and for them, a group of fine art students who wanted to collaborate, they saw that the collective production of art was often ignored in favour of a championing the individual. They could see a problem looming in terms of their assessment and the degree show. They were working collaboratively, and yet when it came to the assessment, they would be assessed individually and have to identify what part of the collaborative project they were responsible for. They thought that this was reinforcing the individual and downplaying the collaborative nature of cultural production generally and in fine art in particular.

And Jonathan Kearney recalls a similar experience:

I can think of one example where two students wanted to do a collaborative project - that was their proposal, so how do you do that? The assessment process requires us to assess them independently of each other, so we had to find ways of doing that and it actually worked out really well in the end, they were two of the best students we had in the end. I think even the way that some of the Course Handbook has been re-written; we've had to interpret stuff in our own way.

Despite potential issues, because of their ability to encourage reflective dialogue, social media tools like blogs can become useful assessment tools, as Jonathan goes on to describe:

...we've developed little practices around how they use their blogs, particularly when it comes to assessments. We ask them to - we actually call it curating - we ask them curate their blogs – particularly at an assessment point. Go through the learning outcomes and address each one, one by one, and create a summary post, which goes to each of the learning outcomes, giving links to previous posts, which give evidence that they have met the learning outcomes.

Geoff Thomas-Shaw also suggests benefits in the use of blogs for assessment:

...internal marking has happened this week with [a tutor from another course], who has been reviewing the blogs in the last two weeks and has come up with a series of questions to clarify, so that makes the marking process much more focused, because you really get to know the project in depth. With over 40 students to review in two days, the opportunity for markers to look at work in detail in advance is a great benefit and is again is much fairer to students.

Geoff goes on to discuss how opening up learner and course activity to wider aspects of the course team can also have benefits if carefully managed:

The external examiner is party to it as well; he is looking at them and gets a really strong view and heightens the anticipation of work he is about to experience.

4.2.4. Expanding educational boundaries through social media

Our experience of space is becoming a dynamic mixture of physical and virtual relationships, of synchronous and asynchronous connections. (Wenger, Smith and White, 2009)

Jonathan Kearney discusses how social media can transform how learning and teaching can happen across time and place:

...one of the big advantages to me is that I can literally be anywhere in the world, and I have taught from lots of unusual places, I've done those synchronous chats from the beach in Thailand, and in Airports,

all over the place, because all you need is the internet connection. We had a student once who connected from a boat in the middle of the Atlantic! It wasn't a very good connection and he didn't manage to stay connected for very long, but he did want to do it, it was part of his project. He sailed across the Atlantic and he documented it.

Communities of practice, rather than being closed, encourage a broad range of participation across boundaries of subject specialism and geography. Members on the periphery of the community have a great deal to offer as they share an interest with that community but may belong to others that take different approaches. There is an indication then that this offers possibilities for cross-disciplinarity and collaboration across boundaries. Social media tools that facilitate this activity increase possibilities for situated learning in context by offering participation by members in other communities.

Process.arts⁵ is a tool developed by Chris Follows which utilises many of the benefits presented by social media to offer a horizontal platform for all staff and students to communicate and collaborate across the university. Here he describes why it came about:

I wanted to encourage input through others rather than always producing my own learning materials [...] it becomes about sharing and maximizing existing resources amongst the university community, people are now less protective about their own resources and are keen to share and learn from others.

He goes on to demonstrate the benefits of the tool:

I cant think of anywhere else where a student from Central Saint Martin's can post something and a student at Camberwell can then contact them and start a dialogue about it, or a cross-college collaboration can start, there is something about the possibilities by both of them being 'under the same umbrella' and being able to contribute to and discuss the very thing that brings them together – which is the work or the passion about the practice and the learning they are doing...

Paul Lowe has facilitated intersecting communities of learners, teachers and practitioners across the boundaries of education and industry. OPEN-i⁶ is a global online community of practice for the professional photojournalism industry. There is clear mutual benefit here as the students can engage with professional practice and the professionals can choose to engage in a more critical and reflective approach to what they do.

... they're kind of enhancing each others practice and forming that community of practice on the course that maps onto that broader community of practice that they are aspiring to become part of or that they are already part of in that broader professional world. So there's that sort of overlap of what Wenger describes as an articulation between the course and the broader profession.

⁵ <http://process.arts.ac.uk/>

⁶ <http://open-i.ning.com/>

Geoff Thomas-Shaw demonstrates the ability of the blog to cross the boundaries between education and industry in a purposeful way:

There is strong evidence of broader communication with the graphic design and communications industries here. In turn this means that there can be number of external commentators other than myself contributing to the project, which is fantastic.

And:

Students are increasingly emailing a link to their blogs to support applications for internships or an interview. Employers or future collaborators get a really clear sense of the kind of mindset, everything from the humour to the practicality, to the workmanship qualities of the person when they read the blogs.

Julia Gaimster has developed an online collaborative drawing tool called Sketchbook with CLTAD:

The aim of Sketchbook is to enable sharing of work from across disciplines and practice. [...] You can have your own portfolio and upload your images [...] others can comment and feedback on the work [...] You can upload a picture and sketch, doodle or type over it. [...] You can allow images to be shared and worked on collaboratively.

One benefit of the tool is the possibility it offers to collaborate with anyone, anywhere with an internet connection:

We are about to use it as part of an international collaborative project with Beijing, they needed something on our server because they cant use Blogger for example.

Julia also discusses her work with the online collaborative environment Second Life⁷, which again can bring remote audiences together in real-time:

...we have had exhibitions in here that has had thousands of visitors... We have also held seminars in here where we have real and virtual audiences - I was interviewing Iris Ophelia who is a Second Life Fashion Journalist while she was in New York.

4.2.5. Developing digital literacies for and with social media

Learners' different approaches, attitudes and experiences of technology represent a new form of diversity which institutions must address to ensure equity of access. (LLiDA, 2009:4)

Julia Gaimsters' experiences echo the report findings:

⁷ <http://secondlife.com/>

...show me a student who doesn't use the Internet or a computer in some form in their studies. As I have mentioned before though, that doesn't mean to say they know how to use it properly and it doesn't mean they all feel comfortable with it...

Paul Lowe demonstrate his commitment to developing digital literacies in context when he says:

...wherever possible we use platforms that are available to the broader community, so if we can find something that the industry is using then we would use that if we can, [...] if you are trying to develop digitally literate life long learners, spending a lot of time trying to get them to use something that once they leave they will no longer be able to use any more seems a little bit perverse.

Jo Morrison describes how her project allowed the opportunity for students to develop their digital literacies through situated learning in context by using it to facilitate a live brief:

So I felt that it would be a place where many of them who actually hadn't used these tools before, and yet they really are keen, going outside, you explore different technologies, because you are expected to be quite articulate and literate in the use of technologies I would say in most industries. It would give them the opportunity to see within their own practice, if they haven't been using them, what might support them in their learning in the future.

Paul Lowe summarises the current situation when he says:

I think we have to think about the kind of attributes that we want our graduates to have in the field of, whether you call it information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, whatever it might be, so when they graduate from here, we're confident that they are able to operate as digital citizens.

4.3 Summary of findings

The evidence suggests that the use of social media can facilitate transformative teaching and learning activity when coupled with a commitment by teachers to an aligned, socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Engagement by students is also required for implementations to be a success, but an aligned approach to teaching and learning activity, curriculum design and assessment that is cognisant of the demands of the learner and situated in the context of wider communities of practice that are 'in the world' makes this achievable as it is a purposeful activity and there are clear mutual benefits to such engagements.

The acquisition of digital literacies through learning in context, learning through teaching activity and within extended communities of practice is recommended by the LLiDA report as being the approach most likely to succeed. As well as digital skills, cognitive skills such as critical analysis and reflective practice are essential in enabling a critically informed understanding of the context for practice and the way to develop within and beyond the educational experience of university study. It offers not

only the chance for survival in the increasingly fast paced and complex digital habitat, but, most importantly, the possibility for creative participation within it as a change agent.

The custom development of the kind of tools evidenced here, such as Process.arts and Sketchbook which encourage communities of enquiry and practice across time and space are not just of benefit in their own right, but they also offer credible transferable models for the creation of desirable horizontal platforms for community building and sustainability within art and design education.

The final section of the case study attempts to pull together further emerging themes from the interviews into questions for consideration towards a community of social e-learning practice. Towards this end, it is considered that the interviews themselves form a significant part of the fellowship outcomes in that they, both singly and together, represent an aspect of activity required in the early stages of such a communities' development, as the book *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002) suggests:

...the key issue at the beginning of a community is to find enough common ground among members to feel connected and see the value of sharing insights, stories and techniques. At this early stage, what energises the potential community is the discovery that other people face similar problems, share a passion for the same topics, have data, tools and approaches they can contribute, and have valuable insights they can learn from each other... (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002:71)

and later:

Interviewing potential members is a very useful way to discover the issues they share and the opportunities to leverage knowledge. Interviews can also serve to introduce the notion of community. This is the first chance to discuss the community's potential value to individuals and to the organization. [...] These interviews not only identify the potential value of the community, they also begin to identify its potential scope, membership and hot topics around which to link community members. (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002:79)

4.4 Towards the development of a community of social e-learning practice.

Cultivating communities of practice in strategic areas is a practical way to manage knowledge as an asset, just as systematically as companies manage other critical assets. At the same time as increasing complexity of knowledge requires greater specialization and collaboration, the half-life of knowledge is getting shorter. Without communities focused on critical areas, it is difficult to keep up with the rapid pace of change. (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002:6)

In the light of the context for this report and through some of the evidence presented here to demonstrate the value of a considered approach to the use of social media

within art and design education to develop transformative practice, it is apparent that there is both a need and a benefit to continued activity in the field of social-e-learning. This section therefore seeks to pull together further evidence from the interviews to develop some questions for consideration towards a community of practice in social e-learning. All of these questions are either directly posed by participants in the case study within the interview transcripts, or are evolved through the discussions and interviews conducted with them.

4.4.1 Considering the identity and relationships of the community

- What are the structures, methods and tools that best meet the needs and expectations of a community in social e-learning practice?
- What are the important considerations for the development of the community identity and role within internal and external frameworks?
- How can it work efficiently and effectively to bringing together and benefit members from across the institution while also encouraging participation by external communities with shared aims through collaboration and cross and inter-disciplinary activity?
- How can it best support its core members by offering personal development opportunities and opportunities to collaborate with other members?
- How can it encourage new members and support them to meet their personal goals through engagement with the wider community as an ongoing process?
- How can learners and teachers work together to develop mutually beneficial research in real contexts, to solve real problems in collaboration with wider communities?
- How can the activity undertaken by the community be presented and re-purposed as live or living knowledge to support wider communities?
- Can such a community enhance the profile of pedagogic and e-learning research within the field of art and design education?

4.4.2 Potential research undertakings:

- Considering the *FutureU*: How might the growth in social media and its potential for significant changes to the way that institutions of all kinds function impact on the future university?
- How can the community creatively engage in the challenges posed by the growth in social mediated activity in such areas as: privacy and security, authorship, ownership and copyright, digital identities and other digital literacies?
- How is the university understood or experienced by students undertaking fully online courses who may never attend the physical institution?
- Building new tools for new ways of working: taking the valuable work already undertaken by members of the community, what other opportunities are there for

the development of specific tools for art and design education in a socially networked world?

- Preparing for culture change: what are the implications for adopting ideas of openness and radical transparency within educational and art and design practices?

5.0 Conclusion

There are clear relationships between the kinds of cultural activity being promoted through new social media tools, pedagogic theory and theories of communities of practice that suggest a case for further development. The case study represents some of the benefits to teaching and learning that can be achieved through an aligned approach to the application of social media tools and related concepts. As this move towards greater use of social media occurs there are serious and significant implications to existing practices that need consideration and attention. Some of this is clearly already underway across the institution and in wider communities, suggesting that there is the possibility for this activity to be integrated, supported and developed further through a more formal community of shared enquiry which could focus activity and connect with wider communities of shared interest for mutual benefit. Since this research project began, some activity has been undertaken towards the development of such a community and it is intended that this report will be of use in providing some of the groundwork required to develop this further. I for one would very much look forward to the opportunity to take part in such a community. As Clay Shirky, the author of 'Here Comes Everybody' says at the end of his TED talk online about 'the Institution vs. Collaboration':

...so the point here is not 'this is wonderful', or 'this is going to be a transition from 'this is an institution' or 'this is a co-operative framework' ... its going to be much more complicated than that. But the point is, it's going to be a massive re-adjustment and since we can see it in advance and know its coming, my argument is essentially, we might as well get good at it! (Shirky, 2009)

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Interview with Professor Neil Cummings [03.06.10]
Member of the Critical Practice Research Cluster
Chelsea College of Art and Design

PM: In 2004 Students you had been working with started up a wiki⁸, can you say a little about how that came about?

NC: Yes, I think it was 2004, all of the information is still on the wiki if you need to check! It grew out of two things – a group of undergraduate students began to collaborate together, Ian Drysdale, Tom Neill, Trevor Giles, Daryl Stadlen and Wei Ho Ng, and I gave a series of lectures and a seminar series – called something like *Free Culture*, introducing some ideas around Free, Libre or Open Source Software (FLOSS⁹) and how this might impact on how art might be practiced and organised. In the seminar we decided to set up a wiki, Ian was familiar with the MediaWiki¹⁰ which he set up on his server (because it was not possible to do it within the College). He instructed all of us in how to edit a wiki. It was a really exciting seminar, we were all learning together. The use of the Chelseawiki¹¹ grew from there, it's use slowly spread from the seminar across the whole of the fine art course.

PM: Why did they choose a wiki?

NC: Because it fitted many of the things we were talking about in the seminar and for them, a group of Fine Art students who wanted to collaborate, they saw that the collective production of art was often ignored in favour of a championing the individual. They could see a problem looming in terms of their assessment and the degree show. They were working collaboratively, and yet when it came to the assessment, they would be assessed individually and have to identify what part of the collaborative project they were responsible for. They thought that this was reinforcing the individual and downplaying the collaborative nature of cultural production generally and in Fine Art in particular. The wiki was exemplary of their activity – taken from the idea of Wikipedia – it's collaboratively produced and as a resource it remains in the public domain. For them it was a really important model for art and creative cultural production more generally.

PM: Am I right in thinking the Chelsea wiki is still active, even though they have left?

NC: Yes it is now six years old, which for a wiki is pretty amazing and its huge. It's interesting that the usage goes up and down - it seems to get ignited around particular issues and become very active and then fall off again. In its heyday around 2005-6 it grew very quickly and was rich in resources. I put up most of the seminar notes, and these were added to as we began to collaboratively edit texts on various subjects; for example, 'the gift' (after sociologist Marcel Mauss) which was a term we were using in the seminars to talk about issues of circulating resources that were not owned by anyone, And, also the idea of the gift as a way of

⁸ A **wiki** is a website that allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a web browser using a simplified markup language or a text editor. (from <http://www.wikipedia.org> accessed 14.06.10)

⁹ Free, Libre or Open Source Software (**FLOSS**) is software that is liberally licensed to grant the right of users to use, study, change, and improve its design through the availability of its source code (from <http://www.wikipedia.org> last accessed 14.06.10)

¹⁰ The MediaWiki site is at <http://www.mediaWiki.org/Wiki/MediaWiki> (last accessed 14.06.10)

¹¹ Chelseawiki is at http://www.chelseawiki.org/index.php/Main_Page (last accessed 14.06.10)

binding people into reciprocal relationships. So the idea of 'the gift' was a useful model to think about why people invest in things they don't own.

We also did some studies on Blood Banks - there is a famous text by a sociologist Richard Titmuss¹² from the 1970's concerning the question of why people give blood. Why do you give the most precious thing you have to people that you don't know? These were the kinds of things we were writing and thinking about in the seminar, so these texts developed on the wiki plus we started to post all the bibliographies. Then I realised I could also put my lecture notes on the site and students, if they wrote their essays or theses on subjects that were somehow related, could link these to the lectures and vice versa. Then students began to edit and add to the lectures, I could incorporate these additions into future iterations of the lectures. So that was the most exciting bit, the wiki became this very fluid space, where who was influencing who, who was teaching who, and what kind of knowledge was being shared or exchanged, became very vivid and vital.

PM: What is really powerful about this is that demonstrates how this tool facilitates, or asks us to re-consider the change in traditional roles of lecturer and student.

NC: Absolutely!

PM: With the wiki everyone is learning and everyone has the opportunity to teach and contribute.

NC: Yes, and one thing that the wiki does challenge, along with other software of this kind, is the traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge and where that knowledge resides. Its true that in the seminars knowledge and experience exists as much in the students as it does in me – the person who convenes the seminar. Which is why it was so powerful when Ian taught all of us how to install the software and edit a wiki – I had no idea.

PM: So rather than a 'one to many' broadcast model, it became more of a 'many to many' model?

NC: Yes, and of course as a lecturer or teacher, you always hope that will be the case – obviously in this instance it was a seminar, not a lecture, it's a more discursive form, where something can be collaboratively produced. But often it can be hard to find mechanisms where you can make the collaborative process explicit – its no good just saying, "well, you can all contribute" this often does not work because the existing power relations are still in play – but when a student like Ian is teaching everyone, it empowers others to do the same...

PM: So clearly the technology in this case facilitated the activity, but could you also talk a little about how the way that the software is developed has influenced the process or form of the groups activities?

NC: Yes, well I readily confess to knowing very little about software, I was much more interested in these modes of Free Libre or Open Source software production - how it was explicit that it was collaboratively produced - and the genius of the license, The General Public License [GPL] which licenses the software, and the creative acts

¹² Titmuss, Richard, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (1970). Reprinted by the New Press, ISBN 1-56584-403-3 (reissued with new chapters 1997, John Ashton & Ann Oakley, LSE Books)

that develop it, out of copyright – this means it sidesteps traditional notions of ownership and authorship. Basically it offered a creative way to think about how art could be practiced.

As I mentioned before, conventionally being a Fine Art student at an Art College is about developing “one’s own” practice, and success is measured in winning prizes or securing a ‘one-person’ exhibition, or selling something, or getting a first class degree– all these activities re-enforce the idea that art and creativity is a competitive process, and that only the very best survive. It reproduces the notion of cultural production as competition. Maybe that’s not the only model, in fact that model may not be very productive or indeed very creative. In fact in many ways it feels quite exhausted. So these ‘open’ models of practice offer a very creative, collaborative and productive way forward – not that one mode of production will necessarily replace the other, more that collaboration and mutuality should have more visibility and acknowledgement.

PM: You’ve talked about where these models can rub up against each other within the College - say at assessment. In a University system that is increasingly dependent, not on public funding but on income generation how might these models work on a larger scale?

NC: Well if you look at some of the most successful commercial organisations, they are not using raw competition as the only way of generating profit. Look at Google for instance, where they offer their staff 20% of their time to do something creative or innovative. So where competition works, use it. But it’s not the only drive, its not very efficient and its not universally applicable. Not everything can be turned into a competitive market. So I sometimes have the feeling that Fine Art within the University and in the Art world more generally is behind the times. Just because we are no longer predominantly public funded, it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t aim to create public goods, and in fact this could be our USP, our very point of difference. For example many of the lectures at Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] are available online under ‘open content’ licenses, in fact most ‘public’ American Universities appear to be putting what we can call their ‘content’ online for others to access. Its one of the reason’s I put my lectures on the Chelseawiki is that they are viewable by anyone, anywhere; and anyone can copy, develop and redistribute them.

PM In some cases there may be an angst that goes with the idea of giving everything away – if I give everything away I will have nothing left!

NC: Yes and maybe this is a result of the idea that somehow creativity is scarce and has to be harnessed as a rare resource through competition and markets. Where in fact creativity could be a limitless resource, it could be the most bountiful thing we have and to try and use property and restriction to distribute it is a nonsense – the idea of intellectual property [IP] takes structural mechanisms from the world of artifacts and tries to apply them to a world of ideas or creativity. Maybe they don’t work. To try and restrict and ‘own’ creativity in a moment where we have a dearth of natural resources, where we are running out of everything is really stupid. Creativity could be the very thing to get us out of the mess! We have to try and share creativity and ideas as widely as we can. You have to have the confidence that ‘I am not going to run out of ideas’.

So I’m happy to put my lecture notes online, and anyway, reading a lecture online is not the same as it’s performance, it changes the nature of a what a lecture is...

PM: Well the one thing that it appears to lack is the discussion and the group input.

NC: Exactly, reading a set of notes, which I am happy for people to do, is not the same as actually being there and taking part, I still think the lecture is an interesting format, and 'broadcast' has its place.

PM: I was interested in what you said earlier about the students (who started the wiki and worked collaboratively on their show) and how they used it to discuss and deal with assessment – to question the educational structures of which they were a part – do you think they were successful at doing this?

NC: Well, I don't know for sure but, and I know this only anecdotally, but apparently they were all given the same degree, so in a way I think they were able to get recognition for the way that they had worked...

PM: ... and that sounds like a fair outcome, the exciting thing here is that it came about through a discussion or dialogue... pedagogic theory would suggest that this is a good place to be, to be able to...

NC: ... yes, they could negotiate, to an extent their own terms of assessment, which is surely what you would expect from a group of super- bright students.

PM: How has your research impacted on your teaching in this field?

NC: Well, one of the things it would be good for me to say is, that starting in 2004-5, the Critical Practice research group evolved, now I work less with the undergraduates and more in research. Critical Practice use a wiki to co-ordinate and document everything we do, and it also affects how we organise – we use a set of guidelines drawn up by people who worked in Open Source software development about how to run an Open Organisation. They are a set of very practical suggestions about how to organise yourself if you don't want to use a traditional top-down hierarchy.

So we do things like, publish the dates of all our meetings, we publish the agendas and all the minutes online through the wiki so you can follow and read everything. We publish our budget on the wiki so you can see where the money comes from and exactly where it goes. Many things currently popular in our wider political lives, things like transparency, accountability and openness, are actually encouraged by the use of the wiki. So it's not just a piece of software, a piece of technology, it has actually transformed how we organise ourselves. This idea of radical transparency is quite exciting for me.

PM: At your presentation at Educamp this year you discussed idea about how 'Free' does not mean 'value free' – can you expand on that?

NC: Well I remember that one of the discussions that came out of Educamp was that with this way of working, (of working collaborative and freely distributing the results), raises the question "So how do you earn money?" And I think one of the things I talked about was that you move the point at which you get financially rewarded. Increasingly as an artist, I don't produce an artifact (which I trade with a gallery, who then on-trades it with someone else and I get a cut) – which is a traditional Nineteenth Century idea about artifacts, trade and commerce. I try and provide a service. So I am paid up front in the form of a fee, and then what I 'produce' can be

freely distributed, copied and redistributed. I've been paid, and it's in my interest for the artworks to circulate widely. For example I produced a film *Screen Tests* for the British Art Show 6, which was given away on DVD's at all the galleries of the exhibitions tour. The artwork was itself 'open content' licensed. The fee covers the production of the artwork, my time, my creativity and my investment. By being paid to provide a creative service, the product of that service can then be distributed widely – I don't need to benefit from 2p on every DVD that is sold.

PM: This reminds me of a point that Tom Neill¹³ made in his thesis, that once a piece of software has been produced it costs no money in effect to distribute it or make multiple copies, it is in the initial production where the significant costs are incurred.

NC: Yes and this is again another good example of 'wiki software logic'. Traditionally artists have been taught to think that they make money through scarcity – that the things they produce are rare, selling them for a very high price and getting a cut of that price is the best way to make a living. Although that is not the only model available to us now, perhaps a service provision model is more creative and will be more productive in the future.

PM: At your professorial lecture, you showed a film *Museum Futures; Distributed*. The thing that struck me about the film was that the characters in it are indistinguishable from the technology they use – the body and technology are one – is that a serious prediction or did it just fit the script?

NC: The film is set fifty years from now and it was commissioned by Moderna Museet - a modern art museum in Sweden, they were fifty years old in 2008. They commissioned a few artists, but mostly historians to celebrate their birthday. Mostly, everybody celebrated the fact that they were really important in the Sixties and Seventies, they are less important now, so it felt a little like mourning – it didn't feel like a celebration, so I had this idea that we could instead celebrate their Centenary. So in the film the director is being interviewed, fifty years from now. So in fact while the Director is looking back on the past, she is in fact looking into our future. I had been reading a lot about the 'Actor Network Theory' - reading people like Bruno Latour and they use lots of terms like 'technicity' - they try to break down the traditional separation between us and our technologies, and suggest that actually we are one and the same thing. We as subjects are made by our technologies as much as we make them. There is no distinction. They also ascribe agency to technology, so it seemed natural in the film that the characters were interdependent with their technologies, they are one and the same.

There are also moments in the film when the director of Moderna Museet becomes emotional, then the building begins to respond. There are changes in the sound design, so it is as if the building is responding to her emotional state. So our co-dependency of the technologies we inhabit is less a prediction, and more of a fact.

PM: This leads to my next question... you have just organised the *Parade* event here at Chelsea, is this an example of WIKI or FLOSS software logic being applied to physical, or 'actual' events?

¹³ Tom Neill Thesis available at http://www.chelseawiki.org/index.php/Tom_Neill:_Thesis. (last accessed 14.06.10)

NC: *Parade* has grown out of the same set of interests that inform the Critical Practice research cluster. We've been researching into what constitutes 'the public' – public space, public servants and public institutions, public goods, knowledge, public broadcasting, etc - and it's clearly a very live debate. Academic conferences about 'the public' tend to happen in lecture theatres and other conventional institutional spaces. We wanted *Parade* to be 'in public'. Again using some of the ideas of Bruno Latour, and *Actor Network Theory*, they use terms like aggregating, and assembling publics, so we began to explore and research what it means to assemble a public, 'what kind of aggregations do you need to convene a public?' The space we built consists of a structure assembled from 4320 plastic crates - it was itself a kind of aggregate structure. We worked with architects who were interested in what is called emergent structures. So we tried to aggregate a structure that could, in turn facilitate an aggregation of people around discussions about 'what does it mean to be in public?' As we say in our program 'our modes of assembly, our forms of address and the knowledge that we share are intimately bound', so this goes back a little bit to the idea of 'technicity'; you can't have one (form of assembly) without the other (mode of address) which obviously impacts on the knowledge you share. A conference about public space in a lecture theatre in an institution seems to avoid the issues. So *Parade* literally tried to embody these ideas, and again it's a kind of wiki logic.

PM: It's been the interesting thing for me as I have carried out this research - through talking to people about their implementations, they are not technology driven, they are generally ideologically driven. Therefore it may not be appropriate for everyone, I suppose...

NC: Yes, I keep finding myself having to say it, but I actually don't know much about software and I'm actually not that interested. But as technologies, as tools, what they enable, and might enable is what's exciting. Although you have to continually learn, and be prepared to be creative, which of course is what you are supposed to do as a person in an art school...

PM: Which I guess involves taking risks?

NC: ...Taking risks... in what appears to be an increasingly risk averse environment... and being prepared to fail. With aggregating this structure for *Parade*, we didn't know what was going to happen. We abandoned the traditional conference format, so we were experimenting with different kinds of form and structure through which people can share knowledge. We didn't know if they were going to work, and some didn't, so you have to be prepared, I think, to fail. Which is increasingly hard. We work in a creative institution; it's not the health service where it is literally life or death, so I think we should take risks. But we are increasingly risk averse, like when you do research and apply for funding; you are supposed to know in advance what you are going to do, the outcomes and its impact. Even before you have started. Well that's not possible. It makes a nonsense of real research, where you don't know and you have to be prepared not to know, and to fail. And if you can't take those risks, then it's not research, then it's just an exercise, it's a performance of research.

Interview with Chris Follows [29.04.10]

**ALTO coordinator, Senior technician, creator & developer of process.arts.ac.uk
Wimbledon College of Art**

PM: How did the idea for Process.arts come about?

CF: Through a work secondment at Chelsea I began documenting technical and making activity at Chelsea through film. While some of the footage was used by marketing much of it remained unused (Some of this footage taken then however is now on *Process.arts*). At the same time I was making websites as learning aids for students, but realized a lot of the information I was collating already existed elsewhere, I was aware there was a certain amount of duplication going on.

While I was carrying out these two tasks, there was no immediate aim, but then, while still at Chelsea I applied for the CLTAD fund and worked with help at CLTAD to develop an online resource that shares making techniques and studio practice similar to the archived footage I had taken. I spent the 10-day secondment working in the office and struck up good relationships with CLTAD staff. This proved really useful and I applied for a Teaching and Learning fellowship after this, CLTAD agreed to support the development of the project throughout the fellowship providing project manager, programmer and designer support. CLTAD continue to support the *Process.arts* project to the point where it is almost ready for a six-month pilot.

I developed a blog to document the process throughout the development of the project, documenting meetings with developers and designers to realize the project as a bespoke piece of software rather than an off-the-shelf resource. *Process.arts* uses Drupal, an open source content management software development tool. – There was no budget to buy specific tools so my choices were effectively between Wordpress and Drupal. Drupal ticked all the boxes and the advantage is that it continues to be updated through the additional programming of add-on modules by the Open Source Community. The strength and commitment of this community means that the software tool will continue to be updated.

PM: Are there an issue as far as you can see with the use of externally developed tools for delivery of Learning and teaching at the University?

CF: The resource is a website on the internet like any other, anyone can view it and use it, but initially there were potential issues with letting anyone and everyone contribute to it, in terms of content management, security and quality. The issues at this stage really were, “Who is going to host it?” and “Who is going to pay for the hosting?” This has taken a year to sort out. The University has agreed to host it on the UAL server. Logging in was also an issue, we have so many passwords and login names to remember these days, one of the main advantages of hosting the site within the University is that contributors could use their UAL password to log on.

This means now that anyone can view the content but only staff and students across the whole UAL can contribute. The resource offers a huge archive of information and makes the uploading of content and commenting by others on this content both manageable and traceable.

PM: How will you test the success of the resource?

CF: The usage and success, now that the site is live, will be done through *Google Analytical* which will show content usage and site of access from all over the world. The pilot of the resource over the next six months and subsequent analysis of the data will then outline what is required for future management of the site.

PM: How does, or how can *Process.arts* fit into existing curriculum?

CF: The site is open for use as visitors see fit. The Bronze casting and sand-casting tutorials are on the site now and these previously received over 40,000 hits on Youtube. Users will be targeted during pilot stage at the beginning of next term, to develop further content and shape it for specific use on the courses at the University, such as induction. I do anticipate that there may be initial problems getting staff and students to use the site until they are familiar with its presence and what it can do, or how it can help them.

The site has been live now for one week and has had its first user, who uploaded content without having to make initial contact with me to ask how to do it. They wrote back saying they found it very intuitive, they were excited about being able to have their work alongside that of others across the University.

PM: Where and how do you think the learning happens with *Process.arts*?

CF: If someone puts up work, others can comment and a dialogue can start about the content. Others can add their own work to existing work to compliment the knowledge already there. Anyone who has added work can be contacted directly in order for a more personal dialogue to take place.

Using tags a user of the resource can make their own personalised learning resource. If there is a particular user or contributor whose posts you find useful, this can be seen as a discrete unit of content, so cross referencing and personalisation of content is a big part of the learning, as well as being able to put content up to receive feedback. You could contact a particular user and collaborate on future activities.

PM: How much support, guidance and advice is required to facilitate development?

CF: The pilot should inform this question, in the first instance the user found it easy, but they may put up a post and not come back for a couple of weeks, the fact we are using the UAL mail system means the author of a post can be contacted directly from within process arts to their UAL email, it's hoped this would help users remain active and engaged.

The big thing is that not everyone has time to document his or her creative activity, particularly the way I have been doing it, taking care to present the activity clearly and make it look good. Even for those who already have good documentation, it still requires work to prepare it for the site and upload it – I am under no illusion that this will just kick off and all work smoothly – it will require support and nurturing to get it up and running, I suspect it will be a little like spinning plates!

PM How has the development and running of *Process.arts* changed your role?

CF: Even if *Process.arts* didn't exist, I feel there should be somewhere to refer to documentation of practical activities across the University – there is a need for an archive of creative practices across Art and Design.

PM: As well as archiving, it is of course a learning tool. There are fears about putting learning resources online as it may impact on what the teacher does in the future – the worry of letting go of teaching resources, but the fact that repetitive procedures can be archived can free them up for more interesting duties...

CF: There may be a unique-ness to the way an individual does something that others can adapt and develop. Students can refer to the process before the studio or workshop session so they can be informed in advance, perhaps they decide its not for them!

PM So you become much more of an archivist and provider of learning material – is that a change you are happy with?

CF: Yes – its important for me that the resource is not faceless or impersonal, that there is someone behind the resource that can be contacted. The help and support section is very important in order to make the site very user friendly.

In terms of my change of role though there is the added aspect of being able to travel around the University filming and documenting what people do, to spend a day with them in order to capture it and represent it on the *Process.arts* site. But I wouldn't want to go back to where I was at the beginning of the project, where it was only me doing this. The site potentially presents a strong link between staff, tech and students, outside of the studio or workshop environment.

For example, one member of staff is developing 3D Software tutorials as part of a Fellowship and I have contacted her to suggest they could be placed on *Process.arts* rather than valuable techniques and resources being distributed across multiple sites.

PM: Do you now have to spend more time at the computer developing the site? Are you doing this instead of your previous work, or is this an extra demand on your time?

CF: Back to the proposal for the secondment, I wanted to encourage input through others rather than always producing my own learning materials. Thinking about this, I have spent a lot of time making this tool, rather than producing my own resources, but now it is there, it becomes about sharing and maximizing existing resources amongst the University community, people are now less protective about their own resources and are keen to share and learn from others.

PM: Have you encountered or are you aware of any copyright issues when using resources from others?

CF: No, as long as they are links to other sites rather than duplications of material.

PM: I suppose that this is a way for you to learn and develop as well as you travel around the college?

CF: I want to visit every single college of over the pilot period to let people know about *Process.arts* as I know the interest is there. Now we have a fully functional site I want to let everyone know about it. I hope this will be accessible through the *My.arts* portal eventually.

PM – so potentially the resource can also allows learning across all levels of study?

CF: I spent some time recording the Technical Arts students at Wimbledon last year, they said they had wished they had access to a resource like process arts earlier as they had each individually spent a great deal of time researching specific information that they could have accessed straight away through process arts. Its anticipated the site will not benefit from these types of exchanges until users from across all colleges within the University begin to use the site, I would hope examples of this will be seen early in the Autumn term 2010. There are examples of staff using the site, [a staff member] at Wimbledon watched [another staff member's] sand casting videos on process arts and eventually collaborated with [him] in carrying out a sand casting project of his own.

PM: What then, if any, are the drawbacks of the resource?

CF: The initial funding and the pilot have been fantastic, but there was always the danger that I was creating a beast – something so big that it would devour me! The bigger it gets, the more I am aware that to an extent I become defined by this resource. It isn't yet an official project, despite its support through CLTAD so that is and can be a little precarious.

I am really excited about the project, it is 24/7 for me – a labour of love. Either it has to be done properly or not at all, the funding has enabled this project to be realized to a good level, where someone can see it and understand it fully. Hopefully it will become officially implemented. It has been described as too good to be true, a very easy to use tool where you can personalise knowledge and contribute to the learning of others.

PM: Why did you design a bespoke tool, why not for example develop it through the VLE [Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard]?

CF: It wouldn't have had the attraction of the open-ness through the VLE, Working at other colleges like Wimbledon it can be difficult to see what goes on elsewhere and this tool enables that to happen, it has a live-ness that VLEs don't have because of the way it has been designed. I want it to be a projection of the exciting stuff that is going on around the University on a daily basis.

Also the idea of direct or instant cross-college communication is important, I cant think of anywhere else where a student from Central Saint Martin's can post something and a student at Camberwell can then contact them and start a dialogue about it, or a cross-college collaboration can start, there is something about the possibilities by both of them being 'under the same umbrella' and being able to contribute to and discuss the very thing that brings them together – which is the work or the passion about the practice and the learning they are doing...

Interview with Dr. Julia Gaimster [29.04.10]
Head of e-learning,
London College of Fashion

PM: How did you get involved in e-learning?

JG: I was at Croydon College where I joined the computer group. Then I started doing my Cert Ed, where it became clear that without computer skills I wasn't going to complete the course. So I went and bought a Mac and taught myself how to use it. Then the Internet came along and there was an offer to apply for funding to do a PHD. I looked at idea of using Internet to help students who had issues with caring, money and finance and I looked into how I might deliver some of this online.

So my PHD was based around that, and in the end I decided to do an educational doctorate – a vocational doctorate and started this at Surrey. I quickly realised that developing a whole online fashion course was not possible, so I focused on a specific issue of how textiles students found information online and concentrated it in an area where there was a particular issue which was fabric sourcing. That was my doctoral work that continued when I moved to LCF.

When I came to LCF I was in charge of an HND, which had six pathways, womenswear, menswear, knitwear, embroidery, footwear and accessories and it was dispersed over six sites around London. Communication, planning and organization were problematic. The majority of staff were associate lecturers and students were all over London.

I sought help from ITRDU (the Information Technology Research and Development Unit) in 1998-99, looking for a technological solution, bearing in mind though that almost no one was even using email at this stage! We had an intranet but it was very early days. They had been trialing VLE's (Virtual Learning Environments) and asked if I would like to have a look at Blackboard. So we set up a blackboard site and I got funding to put additional computers into the buildings for the students and staff. I told the staff we would no longer use written notices and that and all course organisation would go online. It worked brilliantly, it was so successful that other courses became interested in it and eventually it was rolled out across the University.

I thought at this time, "well its good for announcements and its good for timetables, what else can we do with it?" This is when I started looking into e-learning in more depth. This is how I started and it was a practical solution that helped deal with fundamental teaching, planning and communication problems to start with.

PM: Yes, and that has helped all of us now, its hard to think about how we functioned without it!

JG: It was a nightmare then. I think the main problem we have now is that Blackboard hasn't moved on as quickly as I would have hoped - enough to meet the needs of today, which are very different to those of 12 years ago. It is still a pull technology, you have to go into it to get the information rather than having the information pushed out to you – we can do this through SMS, but there isn't a strategic approach to the use of SMS at the moment so Blackboard is at the limit of it's abilities in terms of what the staff and the students are now demanding of it. It is

possible that there are staff that are using blackboard for more ambitious e-learning projects, but they are in the minority.

PM: I know in other Art and Design Institutions there are discussions about what the role of the VLE is now and how more individual approaches to integrating technology into everyday teaching can be strategised. In my experience, students like their learning to be as ‘in the world’ as possible...and the VLE as it stands doesn’t offer this...

JG: It is a walled garden in that respect...

PM: ...and it doesn’t look great, which may seem unimportant, but in an Art and Design school it is an issue...

JG: Yes, students also don’t like the way it looks and it doesn’t interact with their other social media software. It’s not that they necessarily want their learning to happen in their social space it’s just that they have become used to the idea that it is possible to go seamlessly from one tool to another.

Its also the lack of customisation – if you look at my browser for example, this is my iGoogle page and it’s very much my personal space – I have customised it to include the tools I need and use on a regular basis, its one of the biggest problems with Blackboard is that students cannot personalise it.

PM: Yes, that’s an important point, as what was the student’s personal space in the College, the studio is disappearing, what is replacing it?

JG: Yes they do need a personal space and we have many who are carving out their own – many of the students, not all of them, have a good level of digital skills, I don’t think it’s true yet that we are yet dealing with a generation of digital natives though, because I don’t think we are. My student advisors, who you have met will tell you that the students they are working with, may be able to use Facebook, but they are very confined in terms of their use of technology – they are not using it to produce e-portfolios or as a tool for learning other than online research to access resources, they are not engaging in wikis and things like that...

PM: I know you have done some work with giving students the transferable skills to enable students to develop a critical approach to using the web, perhaps you could say a little more about that?

JG: Yes, I’ll give you a walk-through of some of our implementations. The first thing we have done and we have tried to encourage others to do the same is to add a tab on Blackboard for LCF, called the Fashion Portal. Students can access all the e-learning implementations from one place.

There is the Pattern Cutting and Garment Construction online tutorial resource developed by LCF and CSM. For students with no knowledge of Pattern Cutting it is a good introduction.

There is also the Textile Resource Guide – funded by CLTAD and the subject centre (ADMHEA) and this implementation came directly out of my doctoral research, where I had identified that students were very un-strategic about searching the web – they

just followed links without a focus or an aim and the biggest problem was a lack of terminology to effectively research online, they didn't have the vocabulary. So a team of us pulled together everything to do with the basics of textiles, sourcing and manufacturing, there are self-assessment elements, quizzes, links to sites, key texts for beginners, intermediate and advanced levels.

The resource promotes good research on the web, but also promotes a broad approach - books are still good! This critical approach is important for me because I think we are dealing with what I call the 72DPI generation, seeing everything through a screen, not feeling, holding or touching – not going to the primary source to get a sense of the real object – seeing for example that the image of a Manet painting that they see on the screen is actually 6 by 6 metres in size.

Whilst I think that the web is a brilliant thing we must be taught how to use it critically, to know how to validate resources, how useful is it, how recent is it, is it an organisation or is it just someone trying to sell you something? So the links we have put in this resource are for validated sites that we know hold good information, and are updated regularly – so we have done some of the initial filtering for them.

They can also set up journals within the resource to copy and paste or type notes. It's not as visual as I would like, as copyright can be an issue of course and it does now need updating, but there is no funding or resource available at the moment to do that. These tools don't need constant management, but they do need revisiting and updating from time to time and the language has to be right and the information needs to be correct...

PM: ...and things change so quickly now in terms of knowledge and information... I have recently spoken to Chris Follows at Wimbledon about his Process.arts site, it is a collaborative site set up to allow sharing of technical knowledge across the University. Because students and staff can upload their own content, in theory it maintains its own inertia in terms of updating and validation of information.

JG: Yes, we also have a video repository on the website which allows videos of tutorials and for example, fashion shows to be uploaded.

PM: So this resource means that some of the delivery of basic information is stored and can be accessed at any time, so it takes away the need for some of the more repetitive teaching?

JG: Yes that's one aspect of it, but also with the contact hours we have now. Textile technology has almost disappeared from the curriculum on many fashion courses not just in the UK.

OK, next we have Sketchbook. This developed out of an old ITRDU project called Seeing Drawing, which enabled students from across disciplines to view different approaches to drawing from across disciplines. It was ahead of its time when we produced it because it was on DVD. By the time everyone had DVD players on their computers however, the web had taken off and everyone wanted updateable web content. So it fell between two technologies, but the content was superb.

The aim of sketchbook is to enable sharing of work from across disciplines and practice. You can have your own portfolio and upload your images or create them in the software. It works on tags so in the gallery you can search for images by tags, you can look at images that others have selected as their favourites, you can set up groups which can be open or private so tutors can set up group for students. Others can comment and feedback on the work that has been uploaded. You can send work out to Facebook and Digg.

PM: So this is a bespoke tool is has been developed for a specific purpose?

JG: Yes, it was built from scratch by CLTAD using Drupal.

You can upload a picture and sketch, doodle or type over it. For crits you can add live annotation. You can allow images to be shared and worked on collaboratively.

As with the other tools, it contains specific elements for learning. It contains information about mind-mapping and research methods, there are podcasts, videos and case studies. Students can add books to their bibliography, they can add links and it is all searchable by tags.

PM: Are the learning resources here about drawing and sketchbooks specifically?

The idea of this is that students can set up their own e-portfolio, share their work and get feedback on it, they can work collaboratively and because its cross disciplinary, its not just for fashion students to just look at fashion drawings, there is value to be gained by students looking at the way graphic designers draw for example – it encourages students to look outside of their own discipline.

PM: ... and this is currently in beta?

JG: It is currently in beta stage – will stay this way until there is further funding to develop it, a bit like Google! We do try to get feedback on it as it develops, one issue was that it did go offline for a while when it was taken off the server and moved – it now resides on the UAL server –and it is stable.

PM: How is it tested?

We did a study and got feedback from users. We got students in to use it and the tool was developed based on their responses. This is the second iteration and the functionality changed as a result of the feedback we got.

It has currently not promoted as much as it could be – it is one thing to develop a tool and test it, but it is then quite another to promote and disseminate awareness of it. We are about to use it as part of an international collaborative project with Beijing, they needed something on our server because they cant use Blogger for example – so somewhere they could create groups and everyone could look at the work done by those groups and it is perfect for that, that's exactly what it was set up for – collaboration. In the past it has not always been used in that way, but that is the great thing about tools – users find their own way of using them – not necessarily in the way they were originally intended.

PM: What is your view on the value of bespoke tools as opposed to available industry developed tools? With blogging for example we tend to use whatever is out there...

JG: With blogging there is no need to develop something in house, Blogger and Wordpress are so advanced and there is so much support from the community, they are so inter-operable. I think bespoke tools are useful when there is a real focused need, and Sketchbook was really about developing communities of practice. The textiles resource is the same – there was nothing out there that framed this knowledge in an educational setting.

PM: ...and that is often what is missing with existing industry tools?

JG: What's missing is that supportive learning context. That's what we've tried to do with the tools we've developed, not just to provide the tool, but also to provide a learning context so there are tutor guides to go with it.

PM: So is it intended as part of a blended learning approach?

JG: We had a big discussion here about blended learning and decided it is a defunct term! Its all learning online or offline and... students don't differentiate their learning... it can happen anywhere... they don't think 'I am going online now!'. I would also like to reconsider my title, because it's more about technology enhanced learning. What does e-learning mean to a student anymore? It's now just part of their overall experience.

PM: Are we at a stage now then where it's so pervasive that we don't have to differentiate it from other learning?

JG: Yes I think it is, show me a student who doesn't use the Internet or a computer in some form in their studies. As I have mentioned before though, that doesn't mean to say they know how to use it properly and it doesn't mean they all feel comfortable with it...

PM: And I guess this might be the same for some staff also?

JG: ...Sometimes even more so... if you think of some staff in higher education they were studying perhaps when there were no computers in University, I had to teach myself how to use technology and I am very comfortable with technology but there are others who aren't...

PM: I wonder what that means for students who are going onto courses where staff are not involved in or interested in promoting technology enhanced learning processes?

JG: Well, there are examples where students have said, why can't I access the lecture on Blackboard that I missed because I was ill? There is an article in the Wired Chronicle – they did a survey saying that 70% of academic staff were using social networking for their teaching, but not in an interactive way - they are just putting stuff up for students to access, not actually engaging students with it. We are still in a situation where some lecturers are still engaged in a talk and chalk mode of delivery – traditional methods of teaching – I am not saying that's right or wrong, but the

revolution in technology has yet to fully embed itself in the classroom the way it has in other normal everyday interactions – its happening outside of the classroom.

PM: Yes, I wonder why that is? Can Technology Enhanced Learning replace what has gone before?

JG: I am not convinced that technology based learning will ever replace face to face teaching, because students like that that engagement. So I think there will always be some areas where it ...

PM: My experience is the same. I am excited by the possibilities, but anyone who uses technology for learning knows where it falls down and is aware that it can't do everything.

JG: What I am really trying to get to with the Information Technology Advisors is that we are trying to move beyond the tools to the learning, so when we do a guide for the students it is not about how (to use technology) it is about why. Why would you use a blog as a learning tool? You can pool your resources there in a range of media, you can test your communication skills there, you can use it as a reflective journal, you can use it as a way of promoting yourself and for making a portfolio. So it's not just about what the technology does but how can it enhance your learning or teaching or classroom experience.

PM: Absolutely, you have to underpin any workshop introducing blogs with how to develop reflective practice and why that is important as a learning skill, often discussing the ways of learning more than discussing the tool itself.

JG: I start by showing examples of blogs, where that use of that blog has actually made someone successful – if they hadn't had the blog, nobody would know who they were. So people like Suzie Bubble, Filep Motwary and the guy who does the Sartorialist, these people have developed their careers through blogs and that inspires the students, they can start to see the potential. Students then have to ask themselves, "Why is a blog important for me, what's the message, what's the purpose?"

PM: Then each student will use it in their own way. We have the VLE for course organisation which allows learning to be more flexible, but then there is this other thing, which is about students finding their best way to learn...

JG: What I always say to staff when I am doing staff development sessions is "I'm just showing you what is possible, its horses for courses, if it doesn't work for you don't use it." Don't think "Oh, there is a tool there I have to use it." What I try to do is find out first what the problems are, what the issues are and then you can say, well if that is the issue you are trying to resolve then here is a tool that might fix it.

PM: Well, I wanted to ask you about that – How do you promote the use of e-learning? What are the important considerations?

JG: What I do is go to speak to course teams, to Course Directors go into senior staff team meetings. We run surgeries and workshops and we try to take it out to sites, because we have a unique problem here of being spread out across so many parts of London. So if you put it on central training it doesn't work. That's where the

technology advisors come in because I couldn't physically cover the whole area. We have this central site and we put stuff on Blackboard. So for example, Peter Tsang and I last term met with the program manager for a group of courses and we sat down and looked at the Blackboard site and we helped them with how the site looked and how it was organised – we basically devised an action plan to develop a corporate identity for the courses so that when students go there they could see that it belonged to a family of courses. Then the Student Advisor did a session with the staff on visual research tools, showing them what was available and how to use it. We got some really positive feedback from that.

PM: As you were saying, it's not the tool but solving the problem...

JG: Yes exactly and it can help to show real world examples of what other people have done to solve problems, for example one course at Lime Grove wanted to improve their use of Blackboard. I asked them what the main issue was that they were having and they said that as their student cohort was mostly international, they didn't have access to the Internet when they first join the course (and joining up for broadband can take weeks or months). So for that really key period they can't get course information from Blackboard unless they are actually in the college. So we looked at the SMS system, and did a pilot where staff sent out messages, not every announcement, just key messages. So for example when they needed to come in for their UCAS application (they had tried a number of ways of doing this in the past with mixed results) – but with the SMS text message, every student responded! It is a technology every student is familiar with, it's a push technology and because it went to their mobile it's very personal to them,

Another example - a lot of Fashion Students hate writing and don't like doing reflective writing, so we implemented blogs to help with this, it helps because they can also put images and video in there and they have found it much less onerous. Also the tutors are able to track activity, because of the chronological organisation of the blogs it's possible to see that the students are reflecting as the project progresses. So that's one more way of finding tools to suit the problem.

Going on with the tools we have here, this is Visual Directions, created by Diana Aronstam and Terry Finnigan. It's about encouraging reflective writing, how to do sketchbooks. There are podcasts on iTunes that can be downloaded that relate to the project.

PM: The podcasts for the project are great (interviews with students about how and why they keep sketchbooks and journals)

JG: Yes I think we could make more use of podcasts here actually.

PM: It's something that a lot of Universities are using now to promote what they do.

JG: They haven't really taken off here though, you need somewhere in the building that is a quiet space. I am working on a couple for the Fashion Portal that I did with visiting people, which still need editing really, but there are the sounds of doors banging and so on, ideally you need somewhere soundproof with the right recording equipment. You also need to teach staff how to do them, how to use the software to edit them. Ideally we would have e-learning technologists, because while a tutor

might have the time to quickly set and record a podcast, it would then need editing and uploading to a server.

So, on the fashion portal we have a list of resources that we have developed as well as some external ones. We can then say to students, go into here and have a look at this because there are resources that will be useful to you...

In terms of Blackboard use, the most advanced course that we've got is the online course, The Fashion Marketing and Promotion Course run by Tim Williams. Blackboard is the main vehicle and focus for their study. There is a calendar a very active discussion board, they have access to sketchbook and each student has their own space. They can access Library and Learning Resources through this, use e-books, chat and access Powerpoint Lectures.

We also have short online courses in Fashion Buying and Merchandising and Marketing and we are about to start one up in Fashion Drawing.

PM: How does that work, moving a course online?

JG: Well it just works, with the fashion drawing course we have a deal with a software manufacturer who makes software that specializes in Fashion Drawing and this means all the students are using the same tool as the tutor and this helps with issues of licensing. It works pretty much along the same lines as the face-to-face course. What we also do with the short courses is Webinars where people pay to log in. We have done a couple of these on Fashion Trends. We get three speakers in and they can come here or attend online using a tool called Mega-Meeting, it gets recorded, uploaded and can be accessed after the event. Of course some subjects need adapting in order to deliver them online but it is suprising how many topics it is possible to deliver this way with a bit of creative thinking and with the appropriate support.

PM: Could you talk a bit about Second Life?

JG: Yes of course. We have an Island in Second Life that we can visit.

PM: How did your work with Second Life come about?

JG: I read an article by Victor Keegan in the Guardian where he was talking about having spent money on virtual real-estate! I thought that sounded interesting and so checked it out. I became a member of a group on Moodle, called Sloodle (a mashup between Second Life and Moodle) and a member of the group showed me around Second Life and told me how to do everything – it was then that I understood it and could see the potential so we got a license for the College.

It is being used by a few universities who use it in various ways, some build virtual campuses with lecture theatres and the whole lot, but thats not what I was particularly interested in doing. I wanted to use it as an extra studio that we could adapt as we needed. For example we have had exhibitions in here that has had thousands of visitors, we have used it for training through CLTAD, students have used it to build sets and environments. We have also held seminars in here where we have real and virtual audiences – I was interviewing Iris Ophelia who is a Second Life Fashion Journalist while she was in New York.

There is a great deal of potential with this tool which we have yet to make full use of, in three years time we will have a generation of students who have grown up with 3D applications. Educationally, there is already a great deal going on inside Second Life, I have been to conferences in here and besides the seminar I mentioned earlier, we also held a seminar as part of the Designs on E-learning conference a few years ago.

We have also had a catwalk show in here that we did with another college. The hat my Avatar is wearing here was designed by a colleague!

PM: There is some good potential with that – these spaces and the characters within them need to be designed!

JG: Yes and this tool runs alongside other aspects of the curriculum here at LCF so we have body scanning which could be used to create Avatars and we also have software that allows a flat textile design to be virtually stitched and wrapped around a form so clothes for the Avatars can then be created.

Second Life is easy to set up and I can join a conference with people from 20 other countries and feel a sense of presence. People go to SL to do things, to meet people and interact and I go there to either create something or attend something.

PM: Is this tool currently used within the curriculum?

JG: At the moment it is external but we intend to get students to use it through specific projects. At the moment we offer it for students who are interested and want to get involved, which is basically our approach to most new technologies. You get a group of people who are interested and get enthusiastic about something, a few more people see that and want to also get involved – they see how it can be useful for them too and it grows organically. I have also found that this is true with implementing VLEs, I have worked with a lot of Institutions across the country with VLEs and staff development and where there is a top down approach ‘you must use this’ it doesn’t work. Without a genuine enthusiasm or realization of how this might be useful amongst the staff this is where issues arise and students complain, because they will go to use the VLE and there will be nothing there.

PM: So how are people best convinced of the value of Technology Enhanced Learning, is it that they see someone else who has used it in a really good way and they say, yes, I want to do that?

JG: Yes and its not just BlackBoard it’s the same with any technology, people have to have role models or examples of good practice – a real world scenario that evidences that this has been really worked for someone who had a similar problem to you.

There is a link on BlackBoard to the IT advisors site. On the site are a number of Guides showing or demonstrating how and why to use various online software tools, blogs, wikis, Twitter, CoolIris, Retriever, Flickr, ...etc, we talk about copyright, Creative Commons licensing. We need to teach good practice while they are here or they may carry on bad practice when they leave and with copyright they can get into trouble –, its no fun to be sued by Getty Images for using one of their images and not paying for it!

PM: How do you think TEL changes the traditional Roles of Tutors and Students?

JG: Some Tutors embrace the technology and use it to their advantage, I think there are a small number of tutors who are scared of the technology and worry that if they use it in the classroom its going to go wrong, others want to get involved but just don't have the time to invest in the training. I think the students are using it anyway, when you talk to them they will be using Skype or something to chat online about their projects for example. Has it really changed what is happening in the studio? I have yet to see the evidence...

PM: Well maybe it has enabled lecturers and students to be more flexible for example about what they do and how they do it?

JG: Absolutely, it has extended the learning outside of the studio considerably. I think it has improved student's ability to research, but there is still a mentality of 'we have computer rooms', its kind of breaking down a little bit where we have computers in the studios and into the workshops so it becomes more of an integrated process, so you can say to a student, oh you are working on a pattern, if you go and look at the pattern archive at Rhode Island there is an historical archive that may help you...

PM: Yes and this can be done instantly, the Studio becomes extended in a way...

JG: Yes and what you also see here is that a lot of the learning is happening in spaces that are not traditional learning spaces – in the canteen for example there will be students at a table working on their laptops, using the wireless network. The learning zone was always full of students, because often rooms are booked or they don't have permanent learning spaces they find other places to work.

PM: In terms of the teaching role too, I have spoken to staff who are working on online courses who can at some points be teaching from anywhere, which I guess has it's advantages, but it works both ways, some have also said that they feel like they are always at work and there is the pressure to look at things away from the workplace is there, but there is the advantage that this can be done at anytime anywhere in the world.

JG: I think you have to set boundaries and deal with expectations at the beginning. If a students sends an email state that there may be a 24-48 hour response time. Make a point of saying these are my office hours online. One student I spoke to about her experience of an online course felt she was getting a better experience than on a Face-to-Face course. There was interaction with the tutor and this was automatically archived, so the chat sessions, discussions, etc could be gone back to, they had the support and the contact of the rest of the group as well. So even though the physical contact may not be the same, the feeling of engagement with the course was there.

PM: That's interesting because we attach a lot of importance currently to attendance, but if the course is in effect there all of the time, it doesn't matter when you go, as long as deadlines are met...

JG: One initiative we've got is that six members of staff will be going to take part in an online tutoring course at Oxford Brookes in June, we have identified that we have plenty of kit but what we don't have is staff with experience of course delivery online – how do you make students feel comfortable and engaged in an online learning environment? How do you go about setting boundaries and this sort of thing, managing the student experience online? We have decided to invest in staff development in that area. Unless you have staff who have the knowledge and the experience you are not able to expand the activity. Hopefully out of this we will get some models of good practice as exemplars to staff. Of course there are still staff and students who have difficulty in accessing technology if they don't have their own computers so we also have to be aware of how we support them and provide access.

PM: Where do you think this will lead, is there a reason why all courses couldn't be online?

JG: I think there are elements of all courses that could be online, it is possible to deliver a great deal online, more than one might think – for example drawing – it is possible for a tutor to deliver a Fashion Illustration course online, We can also deliver pattern-cutting online and so on. What one has to ask is why do students still want to come to University, it is clearly about more than just the learning and the gaining of knowledge?

PM: That's a really good point, the knowledge is out there, in books and online but people still choose to come...

JG: Why do people still fly to conferences when it is possible for all conferences to be online? You can't all go to the pub at the end of the online conference, it's the social aspect – the face to face and body language etc lets you communicate in a way that you can't in an online scenario. It's impossible to take the human element out of the equation – I can't see that it is possible to close down universities and make them all virtual. Having said that, I do think there is more we can be doing than we are doing at present to enhance learning and the student experience, I am not talking about replacing face to face lectures or workshops or whatever, but if we say it isn't about teaching it's about learning, apart from research, do they have the tools to do that?

It goes back to where we started at the beginning talking about helping students to make sense of what they have done. I think information-seeking skills are woefully neglected, and as a sector we probably don't spend enough time embedding these skills in the students when they come on board – we are going to include it in the Introduction to Study in Higher Education (ISHE), part of the new framework to ensure IT skills are embedded when they arrive to give them a starting point. Where is it going? If you had said ten years ago that students would be blogging, you couldn't have imagined that, or Twitter for example...

PM: If we are offering students more flexibility in their learning and enabling them to become more autonomous learners, also enabling collaborative and cross disciplinary practice, then we are forming a different kind of graduate, and I am then interested in what they might go out and do and implement, that changes the practice further, specifically within Art and Design perhaps – its impossible to predict, but interesting to consider...

JG: Or maybe there will be a massive backlash and they will say we don't want to do that anymore! Realistically I can't see that happening, but we did have a situation within the practice of Textiles where there was a general boredom with everything being made using computer tools...

PM: Yes, the same happened in Graphic Design where practice moved back towards the analogue...

JG: Or there was a meshing...

PM: Yes, an exploring of how the analog and digital can work together to produce something new.

JG: I was external examining in China last year and the course was excellent, but all the students had made these digital books for their folio, very glossy, very shiny, they looked ready for production, but I got a bit bored by it and just wanted someone to offer something more rough.

PM: This might suggest that the online thing may not work forever or permanently, life is messy and sometimes you need that to be reflected as part of the experience, there is one thing being efficient, but you need to offer the reality of it as well.

JG: Yes its like going back to the art gallery and experiencing something first hand, not a simulation, its not about one thing replacing the other, but both working together. Its why, when I create any online resource I am always careful to put in a list of books to be referenced – I do think it's important to engage all five senses – if you are going to be a fashion designer you do have to consider all five senses, and the computer only really deals with two!

PM: That's True! Thanks Julia!

Interview with Jonathan Kearney [24.06.10]
Associate Lecturer, MA Digital Arts, Lecturer, Digital Arts Elective.
Camberwell College of Arts

PM: So, I wonder if we could just start with your role.

JK: Currently Associate Lecturer, working with Andy Stiff on the *MA Digital Arts*, here (Camberwell College of Arts) well, its MA Visual Arts, its all one MA now, but MA Visual Arts; Digital Arts I think is the way the officially put it as opposed to MA Visual Arts; Books Arts or the other variation. I also teach the Digital Environments elective for 2nd year BA students at Camberwell. So that is across the BA's, a 12 week elective – and the remit for this was initially quite strongly to be theoretical – it was a theoretical kind of strand outside of their majors, which was then put back into their majors, whatever their particular major was. It has become a little bit more relaxed and I can make it a little bit more practical, but it still has to have a major theory kind of foundation to it, really. So, those are the two main things I do.

PM: Ok, and in 2007 I think it was, you wrote a paper about your use of blogs. Is that right? On the digital...

JK: Yeah, it would have been 2008. Yeah, yeah, the – that was the - what was the title, I can't even remember now. "The use of blogs for reflective learning" – something about blogs and reflective learning. I forget the exact title.

PM: And I know there is a movie about that online...

JK: Yes, yes there is.

PM: which I will reference¹⁴, which is a really good way of getting stuff out there. How did that come about? Was that an action research project for your PGCert?

JK: Yes, exactly. That is exactly what it was, yeah. I had been living in China for three years and teaching on the MA from China. I came back and I obviously had to get that PGCert thing done. So I started that, but then that seemed to be the most obvious thing to do – something that was related to the blogs and how we are using them. The key thing that I was concerned about is: the blogs are working well, but it was still fairly easy for some students to remain quite surface in the way that they reflected. So, I wanted to experiment with three different ideas. Experimenting to try and push them deeper, to see if we could actually try and make them become deeper with their reflections. And to a certain extent they were successful. A typical sort of action research thing, you had the three distinct methods, and asked them to do these things exclusively, none of which were ideal on their own. The best thing was a combination of the three, in which ever balance the student found most useful to them. So, for example one student found it particularly effective videoing herself talking and it was a complete revelation to her. The quote from her was:

" I didn't know who I was or how I worked until I heard myself talking".

¹⁴ The movie can be found at <http://vimeo.com/6426219> (last accessed 28.09.10)

Even though she had been writing like mad and she had been doing all the things she is supposed to do. She has got quite a high level of dyslexia, so she had worked really hard on her writing, but it never really engaged with her own writing. But once she started hearing herself talking about her own work – literally just speaking to a web cam, straight into iMovie. She would speak for 5 to 10 minutes and then chop it up into little bits and the editing became the reflective bit. She listened back to herself and put them on the blog – bang! Her work is utterly transformed, you know, her learning was transformed at that moment. So that particularly worked well. Other students wanted to keep to writing, working through a series of reflective questions I had asked them to work on.

PM: So the blogs were already in place.

JK: Yeah.

PM: And the research in a way was to try and get students to use them in a more productive way – or a more directed way for their learning?

JK: I think so. We had been using blogs as a way to document their learning, you know, as their logbook, basically - since 2004 – I think was when we introduced them. Or 2003? No, 2004 I think that we actually introduced the blogs - as an idea and they had gone really well – it had obviously been driven by the fact that we had online students so we had to find some way of the documenting what they were doing so that we as the tutors could follow them and have discussions and their fellow students could follow them. But the problem was that some students really got into it but there are various issues with the blog. One of them is the classic thing, which is the public nature of it and the fear of being very public. So for some of them it took a while to get over that. There are various other reasons why some students would use the blog and it was actually really good stuff they were doing, but I felt that it was still not very deep.

That was the key thing. I didn't think that they were getting the maximum out of what they putting in – the really deep learning, which they could get to. Some of them did – straight away. But I wondered weather the system we had given them – basically what we said was that they needed to do a weekly reflective piece of writing on their blog and we would give them a series of four questions as a rough outline to get them going and they would follow that and some of them got deep, but others it was kind of mechanical – it didn't really make them reflect and properly look back at themselves. That was the thing – to help them move forward, this is an attempt to break that down a little bit and say instead of just a weekly reflective thing, instead of just following the set of questions, here are some other methods you could try and see whether it works, and it might not work, but it's worth the experiment. So it was basically three systems. I think I asked them to do six to ten posts in each one consecutively and then we had feedback from that, from the online students as well via questionnaire. It was face to face with the peer group.

So there was a fear that it wasn't doing the best – it was doing very well and the external examiner was raving about the blogs each year – but I felt there was still the possibility to get better with it and to get more out of it and even since then lots of things have developed – we've developed little practices around how they use their blogs, particularly when it comes to assessments. We ask them to - we actually call it curating - we ask them curate their blogs – particularly at an assessment point. Go

through the learning outcomes and address each one, one by one, and create a summary post, which goes to each of the learning outcomes, giving links to previous posts, which give evidence that they have met the learning outcomes.

PM: Brilliant. Because that is an important thing about the course, I suppose, both in the blended version and the online version – they are used for assessment, is that right?

JK: Yes, absolutely.

PM: Well, that makes a lot of sense, because the course subject matter suggests that the students can be expected to be able to use the blog. But if it is going to be used then it has to then relate to the curriculum.

JK: Yes, absolutely, yeah. What we suggest to them is that they do, at key points, and if they lots of posts that might be every month, that at key points they do take the time to stop, look back over what they have done over that month and create a summary post of that month and if they do that each month, then maybe every three months... because with the MA now there is only two assessment points and it's a long time, its like two thirds of the course until the end of the first assessment point. We do have a mid-point review – that kind of breaks it into three, but it's not a formal, full assessment point

PM: So, more of a formative thing?

JK: It is, yes. So, if you've been doing all your posts, then you do a monthly summary of those posts, when you come to mid-point review or to assessment points then you do a summary of the summaries. It kind of makes it that bit easier for them to access it and also then for us as well, because where students really get into it does become really quite difficult to follow everything that they write. Now I use an RSS reader¹⁵ and it pops up when they have written stuff and things like that, but it is a vast amount of stuff, far too much to read. It is unrealistic. Certainly for me, working as an AL, it works out that I've got on average something like two hours a week I think. I could quite easily spend five or six hours a week just reading what they are doing, so these summary points become the point when they... well it becomes the assessment. That is the key thing that we are then able to read and then find the links. You know, "What is the outcome that they are claiming? What are the learning outcomes? Let's have a look – oh yeah" or "It is a bit weak that one", you know. "Let's see if they have got any other evidence..."

And you know people say to students: "See it as very strategic", we need to have evidence, make it as easy as possible for us you know, colour code it, whatever, you know, its kind of that idea: make it as easy as possible for us, so we can see: "Ah, there is the evidence", tick, we've got it – and the blog allows that.

PM: Is there separate theory and practice on the MA or are they by nature integrated?

JK: Completely integrated.

¹⁵ RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is used to publish frequently updated works—such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format. RSS feeds can be read using software called an "RSS reader" (adapted from Wikipedia)

PM: So, there should be a kind of evidence of those two things working together.

JK: Yeah, yeah. It is completely integrated, yeah. But again, you, see, with the blog we encourage them significantly to...you know, categories and tags¹⁶. Categories and tags become really crucial and useful things. Because if they do use this properly, even after just two months they have so much material on there. If they categorise and tag it, just get into the habit – it only takes a couple of seconds each time, just to give it a category. You don't have to set up all the categories to begin with, you just let the categories build up – the same with tags. Then you can filter it all afterwards and it helps you then to search through all the stuff yourself. Particularly where they are then doing research and their own work. So we see a bit of video – is that theirs or something they found? You know it needs to be clearly tagged and categorised, so that we know: “Ah, ok that is somebody else's work”, which is useful. And then we can see their work and see the connections and see how this has all been pulling together – so categories and tags become really useful, really important.

PM: That is a good point, I am thinking about my MA group at the moment and a lot of them struggle at certain points with their self-directed projects and actually categories and tags might start to flag a focus or a direction, which is really nice.

JK: Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

PM: So almost by accident...

JK: Definitely, and then you use the tag cloud¹⁷, you know. You put the tag cloud out and: “Oh, that is what I am interested in”. There is a great quote and I quote it in that paper that I wrote a couple of years ago from Moon - I can't remember the first name...

PM: Jenny, isn't it?

JK: Jenny Moon, yes. She quotes someone who was keeping a blog and they said that before they started they thought they were interested in three or four things, I can't remember exactly what they were. Then after six months of them carefully writing their blogs, choosing the things they were interested in, posting those links, they then looked back at it and said, actually, they were interested in those things, but they were particularly interested in x,y and z and it was exactly as reflective learning should be – it held the mirror up to them and they thought “Aha, that's who I am, that's what I am interested in...”

PM: Perfect.

JK: Very, very useful and I have seen it with students, where they do get into the tagging and then, you know, they are struggling and then, ok, lets have a look at your blog, lets have a look. You put a tag cloud on, lets see what comes up and look at

¹⁶ Categories and Tags are a form of Social book-marking, a method for Internet users to organize, store, manage and search for bookmarks of resources online. Unlike file sharing, the *resources* themselves aren't shared, merely bookmarks that *reference* them. (adapted from Wikipedia)

¹⁷ A tag cloud or word cloud (or weighted list in visual design) is a visual depiction of user-generated tags (see previous footnote (adapted from Wikipedia))

that: that's the things that are interesting to you. It really can, kind of, spark of some kind of direction and ideas, you know. And that is one of the beauties of it I think, because when I did my MA and we brought in things for the final assessment, you know, I brought in two suitcases full of logbooks. And to go back through that, you know, took a couple of days to kind of flick through things and think, you know, "What are the important to highlight here?" – and of course it is all on the blog. It is that much easier to search it. It does some of the work for you.

PM: Absolutely, and you know I am all in favour of journals and sketchbooks. I think they are invaluable. But they are visualised through a personal, perhaps visual language, and you can incorporate, or students can take out important bits and put them on the blog, but it is again this explicit use of the writing to explain why it is important, I suppose.

JK: And one of the things we said to students as well, obviously take photos of your sketchbook and we kind of expect that, however rough or ready it is, you know, that's kind of on there. One thing, and it was my kind of hypothesis, I guess, before the paper – and I don't know if I really proved it, but I think there is probably enough evidence to suggest that it is the case, certainly for me personally it is the case – the idea of the artist in the studio and you've got all of your kind of detritus that comes from your action of making and considering and then moving on... and then you've got the blog and you can't kind of just gather all of that studio and throw it on the blog. You've got to self-edit that, you've got to choose, you know: what I am going to put on there? That in itself forces deep reflection. Even just that moment of saying "What do I choose to put on there? What pages do I photograph from my sketchbook? Why am I choosing that? And what is my feeling about that?" That drives deep reflection straight away.

PM: I completely agree. You know, even on a kind of aesthetic level, those images of sketchbooks can look fantastic as part of their kind of development work as well. There is no doubt that the making of the blog is a reflective activity in itself.

What are the differences then in the way the course works in its blended form and online form with the use of blogs? Is it the same? How does the studio, or real life, or face-to-face aspect sort of ... - which bits does it replace? How is that replaced in the online...

JK: Specifically the blogs?

PM: Well, no actually.

JK: OK, so how they actually compare and contrast I suppose. Well, the blogs are the same. Face-to-face and online are required to, you know – the blog is the way that we do assessment. We say that from the beginning and they know they have got to do that and despite the fact that it is digital art, we do have quite a number of students who blog and are a bit scared of it. You know, they have never done that before and they don't want to – they are a bit worried about it. As well we have other students, you know, who could write Wordpress¹⁸ themselves you know, so we have got a whole range of students.

¹⁸ **WordPress** is an open source content management system often used as a blog publishing application (adapted from Wikipedia)

So, broadly the same requirements right across, you know, the two modes of the course. The way the... obviously we've got this physical space that we are sitting in right now and this is the meeting place – every week the face-to-face students will be here, its normally a Wednesday, because then it catches the part-time and the full-time students and there will all sorts of things happening here, from workshops to group tutorials, or you know information... happens here. With the online, we have a very similar thing. Basically, every week – online is only part time, so we've got a first year and a second year with them – and every week we have a synchronous two-hour chat session with the first years – and the second years separately and that is a consistent thing, right through the year - and it even kind of carries on when we come to holiday periods for staff the students often carry on, because it becomes just a regular thing. That is 1.30 in the afternoon UK time, because we've found that's very practical, but when you are at the west coast in Canada, then it is 6.30 in the morning, If you are in Japan, it is 10.30 at night. We haven't had anyone from New Zealand or Australia yet, because that would be a bit of a struggle, because that would literally be in the middle of the night for them. But it is, you know, the big spread literally across the world... and we've got one from Canada too and one from Malaysia at the moment. We haven't got anyone in Japan this year.

PM: So they are all talking together in that same chat space?

JK: Yeah,

PM: What do you use for that is it *Wimba*¹⁹?

JK: Yeah, this year we've used Pronto, which is the type chat environment of Wimba, it's OK, it's not great. Probably the best was a plug-in developed by ITRDU²⁰, they don't exist anymore, for Blackboard, it was a separate little thing in Blackboard, which was this chat environment that worked really well and there was this one little thing that was the best and they still cannot do this in Pronto. What we found is for the synchronous thing was that it had to be type-chat, two reasons for that: one, the protocol of voice-to-voice is very difficult if it is not strictly moderated by a chair, so the idea of a kind of flat level joint co-operation between peers is very difficult voice to voice or video to video because where do you get the indication of who wants to speak next? It needs to be chaired and someone says "Right so-and-so is now going to speak" and everyone stops and listens it has to be like that, you know indicate that I want to ask a question, it has to be very formal. The other thing is we have people right across the world and often on very low speed connections. Indeed I was living in China and it was a massive problem there because of what they call the '*Great Firewall of China*', which kind of blocks almost everything! So type is better for that because it's low bandwidth and you can have multiple conversations going on all at the same time and it's not a problem 'cause your just addressing different people. The other thing is that students really like the synchronous version of the chat is that there is a record of it all, so afterwards you have an archive of what's been said. So if you have missed a session you can read through it and pick up on important information and that kind of thing.

¹⁹ Wimba is software for online education, more detailed info available at <http://www.wimba.com/>

²⁰ ITRDU (Information Technology Research and Development Unit) a research group at the London Institute

This little plug in for Blackboard all these years ago, what it did was it truly felt like a virtual room and users went and joined it. If you joined it an hour late all the previous chat would be there and you could scroll back up to the top and read it all. We would have students who would join the chat and they would say, "I am just going to catch up" and five minutes later they would say, "Right I'm with you now" and they would know what's going on. Pronto doesn't do that, you join Pronto and you only read from the moment you join, all the previous conversation is missing, there is a workaround but it's very clumsy. The nature is that you have students who because of certain times of day might be actually at work, you know they might be given two hours off at lunch break on this day to join the chat and if a meeting goes on too long they are going to join us half an hour late and you've got to repeat information to them, it can be very frustrating. Particularly when it worked so well six or seven years ago! Small things like that can really make a difference. Another little thing, in Pronto everyone's the same colour, in the other thing you could choose a colour, so you could see when you typed it was red and when someone else typed it was blue...

PM: Right, so you could easily trace who...

JK: It doesn't seem really important, but it really helps when you are tracing through a conversation. There were some weaknesses with that and I am sure there are ways to improve it but we were told to use Pronto because it helped us with our feedback, but it isn't great.

PM: But on the whole, this combination of tools, with the blogs that the students were asked to use, with the synchronous chats etc, they are happy and feel that they are part of a community?

JK: I would go as far as to say that the online students, the group dynamic, the sense of a group of a peer of students working together is stronger with the online students than it is with the face-to-face students and that's happened almost every year. And that's despite the fact that they, potentially, there's no requirements to come here, so of the ones who are not in Britain, in fact even a couple of the ones from Britain aren't coming, the second years who are graduating this year, they'll be in the show in 2 weeks time, I think there's only two of them coming, who will actually be here, so the likelihood is that they will never, ever meet face-to-face. But there's such a strong sense of the group and supporting each other and being with each other, and it's quite moving at times actually. Someone, very, very sad, one of the students this year, her Dad and one of her Uncles were killed in a car crash, she had come back to Britain, she was living in Malaysia with her Dad, she'd come back and then got this message, the support from the group was phenomenal, incredible, as much if not more than you would get from a face-to-face (f2f) group. There was a real sense that they were together, they knew each other, almost because of this discipline of the two hours every week having a chat – and these chats can get really lively, they can get very funny, they can get quite angry and cross and sometimes because you're online words come across the wrong way, and they've been through all that together. I've known them for two years and you get a really strong sense of a group.

PM: It's a really good example of a group held together by the activity?

JK: Yes, absolutely

PM: Brought together by their shared interests

JK: ...and very very diverse people, very diverse work and yet they are held together by that...

PM: without any f2f?

JK: Yes, none at all. Yet some of the f2f here it can be a bit... there isn't quite... I don't know, there isn't, maybe it's because we don't quite have the discipline, it's a bit more open so, because you know, one student's in India, his MA is in effect ... the UAL is to him is that 2 hour chat session every week, so he has no contact with us whatsoever. He can't come to the building, he can't go to the library, he can go online but, do you know what I mean, that's the UAL is that two hour session...

PM: Is there email contact with tutors?

JK: Oh, yeah, absolutely...

PM: And how do students connect with each other outside of that Chat session?

JK: Email, commenting on each other's blogs. Email is crucial, we wondered whether other things might work a little bit better, but actually email is actually still the key thing that holds them all together, email and outside these synchronous chats email's the thing that still works. We've started experimenting with Google Wave, which is their new attempt at reinventing email and there's some good possibilities in that, there's a bit of a way to go yet, but there's some good possibilities, and what that could be really useful for, is the sense of an ongoing conversation, asynchronous. We did try message forums as well, in the early days we had to do it through Blackboard, they didn't really work because we had the synchronous thing, that worked really, really well for the conversation and then we have the wiki and with the wiki there is the principal of it being open, you know, they can edit it, they can change it and everything gets organized through it. The front page for the news stuff, the students edit that, they just keep adding more and more stuff. If we see something, we'll add it as well, but the students pretty well run that completely. We keep documents on their, tutorials, really basic, we put a list of times up there and they put their names down next to it, it's as simple as that you know, but it works really well. Any useful research stuff is on their, any background stuff, all the planning for the final show, because of course the final show is completely integrated with the f2f course, that's all done on the Wiki. The Wiki has become the most effective way for the whole lot to collaborate together.

PM: Do you have a different one each year?

JK: We just keep building on it...

PM: So there is a record of a journey and a history?

JK: Yeah, and you can archive stuff, Tag pages for certain years, so all this years show planning will just get tagged for this year and that gets put on a menu item, and then you might delete some stuff. The only hassle with it, and this was Neil Cummings recommendation to us, early on, 'cause we're using Wikispaces, which is

the free thing, which is OK, not a problem, but he said they hit a problem with the critical practice wiki which just gets so big, that what you really need to do is go for a media wiki, which is a separate install on a separate server, the problem being that you can't do that on the UAL servers, so you then have to have your own space.

PM: That's what you get for pioneering practice! Maybe we can talk a bit about the time taken with the online course and effort that goes into these kinds of implementations. I guess in the current context of the financial squeeze, there might be a temptation to send a lot more courses online. In your experience is it easier or cheaper?

JK: Time wise, our experience is, and this is backed up by the literature as well from what I've read, is that it takes as much staff time, tutor time and possibly more time to create the group dynamic, to invest in the students, to get the learning happening with the online course. I guess where it's cheaper is that you don't have to have the physical facilities and resources, as the students are online they need to arrange their own facilities. Having said that they do pay the same as the f2f students, there is no difference between the cost. So I would say it's equal in terms of the staff time...

PM: Well and as you were saying, if not more so. I suppose you have to keep up to date with the technology and plan curriculum in advance...?

JK: Well, there is that side to it as well, I have just have just been looking at an online learning system called DimDim²¹, which we have looked at and used before and I was looking at it again because there's been some updates, but of course that takes an hour or so, opening it up and running tests. Moodle is another open source system, so you've got to keep on top of all these things, so I guess there's a bit of time involved in that.

There are advantages to the online course from the staff point of view, for example one of the big advantages to me is that I can literally be anywhere in the world, and I have taught from lots of unusual places, I've done those synchronous chats from the beach in Thailand, and in Airports. All over the place, because all you need is the internet connection. We had a student once who connected from a boat in the middle of the Atlantic! It wasn't a very good connection and he didn't manage to stay connected for very long, but he did want to do it, it was part of his project. He sailed across the Atlantic and he documented it.

That was pushing it a bit, but he managed to do it. So that's one advantage, particularly when I was living in China because it was late at night, the chat started about half-nine and went on to midnight, which was perfect because it meant I could do a day's work in the studio and teach at night.

The problems it creates and we get this again and again with the online students is that they have a constant sense, not from the students here, but we need to do better at integrating the online students with the f2f students, because when for example they are having to plan the final show, they are suddenly having to get to know each other, so we need to do a bit better earlier on. We do get them involved in the mid-point review, so literally we will be having a mid-point review going on here (they have five minutes to present their work and then it's a silent crit, everybody else can

²¹ Dimdim is a software company that provides a web-based platform for real-time, rich-media collaboration and meetings. More info at <http://www.dimdim.com/> (adapted from wikipedia)

talk about their work but they have to remain silent) and we will have a web cam with all the online students interacting with that as well. They will type their questions and someone is monitoring that and adding the questions into the conversations. But we haven't done brilliantly with that and we need to do more of that.

So the students have done very well at integrating with each other, but the online students do feel that with the University as a whole, they're (the students) are out of site out of mind, because they are literally thousands of miles away. Simple things like, it can take months for them to get an ID card, that's really important 'cause that can help them get into the Universities in the cities where they are to use the libraries, without that, they can't get in. So it's simple things like that, enrolling and getting them onto the system so that they can get onto the library systems here (although the library are pretty good here actually I have to say!) So that kind of thing can sometimes be a problem and they do feel that they are sort of invisible, which they are in some ways.

So, if there was a move to push more courses online, I would say great, I think there are some advantages to it, I don't think it's perfect, I think what were looking at is a really interesting combination of the two, 'cause for some students it will work really well, but for others it just wouldn't work at all. I think there are some great strengths to f2f and there are some great strengths with online and these strengths are different to each other. But if we are going to push more courses online it has got to be realistic about the staffing levels and what's actually needed and student support. Maybe they don't use facilities, that's one thing, but that should mean there's more money to put into staff spending time with them. Which ultimately is why I think students come here, I think as teaching staff we all know that, it doesn't matter if we put all our curriculum out there for free and all our lectures online, I don't think it would make any difference, because I think students want to come here and interact with us and with each other, the student group. Possibly the more of our stuff that is online, the more interest there would be, "Hey, I would like to go and learn with that person because of the way they're thinking" but maybe Institutions don't think like that you know!

PM: Well pedagogy tells us that students can learn as much from each other as they can from us, but therefore I think that the F2F stuff is pretty important... but one can market the other in a way, there is a whole discussion as well about Open Education Resources (OER) going on at the University and in most examples it seems to work really well. If we are encouraging students to make and share knowledge together, then why shouldn't we work the same way?

JK: Well look at the Institutions that are, Stamford, MIT - iTunesU is full of their lectures, I am sure it only increases their student numbers actually, cause you look at that stuff and think, "Well, I would really like to be with that group and see what's going on there you know?" There's a University in Kansas, there's a guy there, he's an anthropologist and he's done some work on Youtube, from an anthropological perspective. He has stuck some videos on Youtube and it's all about kind of new media and the way it challenges stuff, It's become a big hit and he's all over the internet, his videos are all over the internet, the stuff his students do, you know, their collaborative projects are all over the internet and he's got queues of students trying to get in to this little college that no-ones ever heard of in the back end of Kansas, because he's put it out there you know? It's an interesting thing.

What I'd like to do more of is, how can we capture... because it's quite easy to capture a lecture, its quite easy to capture the one-to-many thing, how can we capture more of the group discussion thing? So that people can then see that and think "Oh, that's really interesting, I'd ask that question if I was there" or "I'd never thought of that perspective"

Ways that we can capture that more, and that's partly the challenge of integrating the online with the face to face. It's much easier to integrate the f2f with the online discussions 'cause you can just log them in, they can just log in and watch and be involved in the chat, although we do find with the type chats that when it gets over about 12 people it does get a bit difficult to manage, it's very easy for some to not say anything. Our optimum number is probably nine, we had a year of 15 and it was tough. With the smaller numbers, not only do they want to be there for the 2 hours because that's their UAL, they need to be there because they feel a responsibility to be there to contribute to the group, which is really interesting. With a bigger group, it's a bit like "Oh, I won't be missed".

But we do need to find ways of capturing the group thing a bit more, because a lot of the online learning, and a lot of the systems that are out there as well... and Wimba does this, Elluminate²² does this... its all around a pedagogy of 'one to many', the teacher telling the student... they present, they get the screen control, they present their voice, everybody has to put their hand up to comment or vote and its all very much 'me the teacher and you all the students sitting there silently' and responding when I ask you to respond and this is MA level, that's not how it works. This has got to be a collaborative group of peers, and we as staff consider ourselves as peers with them, you know how it all works! And its really bizarre that we've been doing this PGCert which is all about that and then we have the tools like Wimba that are almost talk and chalk type stuff just in an additional format!

PM: So there are still possibilities for new tools to further enhance this kind of shared knowledge creation?

JK: Definitely, I still have not seen anything where I've gone "Wow, that's it!" I still think there's a lot more we could do, it's way beyond my capabilities or my remit, but using the tools, you get kind of frustrated with them, you always think, I want them to be more collaborative. I think it's a pity, because those tools that were developed by ITRDU all those years ago, they could have been marketed and sold as excellent tools I imagine, I am no business person but...

PM: It makes you wonder if there is a role for research into developing tools for learning, whether it be Art and Design specific or tools for learning in general...

JK: Yeah, particularly the MA, I mean Elluminate's not a bad system, we did use Elluminate for three months and that was quite a good system, but it was still this very front led thing, it felt like a secondary school – or even primary school type environment which had been adapted a little bit for University. But we are still looking for something, which is truly collaborative which can be peer lead.

²² Elluminate is a web conferencing program, Elluminate rents out virtual rooms for classes and meetings (adapted from Wikipedia)

There's this tool as well, have you seen it? Where you have a normal piece of paper and you write on it, it's not digital paper, but it's just got these little dots in it and it's this touch sensitive thing, this pad, it's not expensive, it's about 150 quid I think, but you have to use this specific Pen, and this pen has a camera in it and it knows where you are writing because of the special paper with the dots. So you scribble notes as normal and it records what you have written, but it also records the audio of what's going on around you. So in one to one it's perfect but actually in a group it works as well... you start scribbling down notes and you can hear the whole discussion, listen back to the whole discussion and it gives you a video at the end and the video is of the page with the notes or however many pages it is, all the notes are there in light grey and as it plays along it goes dark so you can see what was written at a particular point. It's an interesting tool, I would love to get hold of one of them and experiment and see what could you do with that?

I suspect with the iPad and such tools we are just at the beginning of what that can do as well, it's able to translate writing into editable text which is the next level, the character recognition. But going back to the tool we were talking about before, it doesn't have to be text, it can be scribbles and pictures and classic sketchbook notes it's visually interesting from an art perspective, literally showing how a drawing develops, playing it back line by line.

PM: This sounds like what might be called reflecting or thinking in action, talking while you are doing and recording that?

JK: Exactly yeah, I've seen it used in one situation in a small group tutorial at a University and the tutor wrote the notes while people did their presentations, and they wrote a couple of comments about it while they were listening. You can hear what the student was saying and you can see for example that the tutor has picked up on these three points, while I would have picked up on those three, you know, the idea then is that became a document for the rest of the class, which was then given to them at the end, they could have a photocopy of the notes and the digital version which can get played back.

PM: Good for the people who weren't there, that's interesting as well

JK: Really interesting, because you've learnt from the feedback to the other students as much as you would from... I was just teaching in Beijing a few weeks ago, 'cause I asked you about the Interior and Spatial Design MA, 'cause there's quite a few students interested in that kind of course and it's who want to do an MA in London, so I was helping them do a research proposal and that kind of thing so they get into the mindset of preparing for an art education... a challenge which is completely different from here, it's really hard for them to get into the mindset of what an MA is, independent learning, reflective learning, it's a big cultural shift. At one point I offered to do one-to-one tutorials with the students and they were very keen for that and one of them very sheepishly said, because there were two of them interested in similar things, said "can I come and listen..." and I said, "hey what a great idea, why don't we say, I will do a one-to-one tutorial and I will just talk to the person there, but anyone can listen" So for the individual student, you won't get anything less, because I will be focused on you, I will be talking to you, but anybody can come and listen. And they did, they were there taking notes. So for them it was a useful experience, even though it might not be directly related to them. And that's the point of tools like

that, you know you will always learn something from the conversations other students have. So there is a lot more we can do with these tools yet.

PM: The thing I thought of when you were saying that is, I've been reading all of the e-learning strategies, and they talk about giving the staff the confidence to be able to make those leaps into new areas and take risks, and they are saying, "How can we do that for more staff beyond just the 'enthusiasts' and so I guess, again, because of the course you are delivering, those kind of things are very closely related to the practice, so it's easy for you in a way to make those leaps and for other courses those (implementations or interventions) may not be so appropriate?

JK: It's a tricky one because, what's that guys name *Prensky* is it? Who talks about digital natives and digital tourists and we are in that tricky stage now where probably the majority of teaching staff in any University are digital tourists or kind of on that boundary and most of the students are digital natives, that will be completely different in 20 years time. So we are kind of in a difficult stage where all these tools are exploding and the possibilities are open-ended, we have no idea where we can go with them and some of them are dead-ends, but we have got to go on exploring them and finding out what's out there. And then you got these natives, well I think Prensky's changed it, I don't think he calls it digital tourists, digital natives anymore, cause he's identified that if you are 45-6, below that you would have had computers at school, above that you probably didn't see them until you were in some kind of work environment. So that is an issue and I don't know how to get across that. I fit completely in the digital native; I had computers at home ever since I was a young child so...

PM: This leads quite nicely onto the next bit really, what you have identified is that most of the solutions you use are problem-based, I suppose if you have an online course, most of the solutions to problems are going to be technology-based, but first of all comes the pedagogy and you identify the problem and then if technology can help with that then, I guess that's the approach?

JK: Absolutely, and that's very much the case for [The Course Director] and I in our art practice as well, I am not a programmer, I can get hold of *Processing* and *Open Frameworks* and do a little bit, I've learnt enough to be able to do what I need to do, and he is the same and that's the approach we have had with this – "What do we need to solve this issue?" and if that means Blackboard then we would happily use it.

PM: Last time we met, we talked about ideological approaches to choosing software and tools, Your students use Wordpress blogs do they?

JK: We say that they can use anything they want, because there's lots of different options out there. This year, and we review this each year, it would be the case again, because nothing is really competing with it, we recommend *Wordpress*. You can go to wordpress.com and in three clicks you have got a blog and it's good and well organized. Then later if they want to they can download a full version and host it and put it on their own server and have a lot more control over it. Blogger was very clunky but Google have got it now, there are ones that promote themselves as educational blogs, Edublog I think is one, but basically its Wordpress, it's a multi-host version of Wordpress, so it's the same thing. I cant see that they're offering

anything that I can't get on a normal Wordpress thing. When I looked at the centre for Edublog, they were saying you needed to be a student or an academic to use it. What we have found is the the blogs can become really useful afterwards (once the student's have left) so its crazy to use that and then have to leave and learn something else!

PM: So you have to use tools that will be around for some time, and I guess with open resources you can be pretty sure they are going to be updated?

JK: Well, it appears so, Wordpress has been around for five years now, it's on version three... its almost too fast now, it's constantly being updated and its completely open source with people all around the world contributing stuff to it but you do get quite a lot of adverts in there. But actually, I was talking to my son about this, he's got his own website, I bought him an address and he's got a Wordpress install and he can put all his stuff on there. I said " do you want the adverts or not?" and he said" No, the adverts are fine, in fact I'll set up the Google Ads thing and see if I can earn a bit of money!" I wouldn't want to clutter my site with adverts but he's familiar with seeing adverts on the web so... yeah fine.

Just the other day one of our online students was asked to present some of her work to a gallery because they saw some of her work on her blog and she was very nervous about being open and public so I'm really pleased that it's her who's got this because she's like "Wow, someone has seen my work" and there's nothing definite, but they want to talk to her and see a bit more about what she's been working on.

We had another student who finished the course and went for a job interview, I forget what the job was, some kind of video editing job. As part of the application he mentioned he had been doing the MA and put the address of the blog. They looked at it and went "Ah! This guy's a bit more than we had thought. He went for the interview and they said, "Well, we were going to interview you for this job, but actually we think you could fit in this area and we would like to offer you something different", it was much more interesting, more creative, lots of ideas, because they had found someone who was out there and being open on his blog.

So any system that is education only and then has to end afterwards, seems to me to be working against the principal and the positives of this. Blogger will be fine, cause its Google, Wordpress is fine cause its continually updated, you can't guarantee any of these things, because you can look back at a history of things that quickly disappear, you know, and things do change very quickly, but with Wordpress there's quite, a large economy that's grown up around it. So for example, there are a significant number of companies that design templates, themes they are called, for Wordpress and they are obviously making, not a lot, but reasonable amounts of money for them. You can buy these off the peg things but they are quite well designed, or you can commission them to design something for yourself as well as the freebie ones that are out there. So there's a whole economy that has grown up around Wordpress, which would suggest it wouldn't collapse in on itself because there is too much invested in it, the ecosystem around it.

[At this point one of the online students arrives with the Course Director, we all chat for a short time and then they leave.]

JK: He an interesting one, he's a teacher, Photography BA and he's graduating this year from the MA, so he's been through the whole system for two years. He knows teaching from a f2f context.

PM: So its interesting for him having gone through the online course, its great that he's had the opportunity of going through this system. Right, Let me try and wrap up. Paul Lowe talks about this as well, if you use pedagogy to make students more autonomous and more self-directed, you can get to situations, like Neil with the Critical Practice wiki, where students kind of rub up against the curriculum like assessment, and I wondered if you had come across situations where students had developed to the extent that they cause you to rethink the curriculum in any way?

JK: [The Course Director] will probably have more examples of this, because its him who deals with that side more, but I can think of one example where two students wanted to do a collaborative project, that was their proposal, so how do you do that? The assessment process requires us to assess them independently of each other, so we had to find ways of doing that and it actually worked out really well in the end, they were two of the best students we had in the end. I think even the way that some of the Course Handbook has been re-written; we've had to interpret stuff in our own way

Where it says for example "log your learning" we just took that as the blog, we didn't have a problem with that and I think once people saw the evidence of what was there they went "OK Yeah, that's OK" But the other thing that springs to mind is what we've touched on already, in that with some of the tools that's provided, it's contradictory to some of the pedagogy we are supposed to be following, on the MA where we are developing peer and collaborative learning and yet the tools are chalk boards in a digital environment!

PM: Yes, I guess you have that on one level, but I'm finding increasingly that the ways computers function offer us new ways of working in terms of networking, sharing and collaboration...

JK: So the actual tools we are using can re-shape what we are doing, the way we are teaching but also the content, I think that's the thing, it isn't a style thing, its challenging what is learning and I find that very interesting, exciting and encouraging. It's absolutely not forgetting what has gone on in the past, but it's building on that and saying, but this now gives us a new possibility here, so lets go and explore that and see what happens.

PM: I am just running this past people because I am wondering if there is a situation where the curriculum has to be maybe more flexible, where the students interpret and define the learning outcomes for themselves, because we are also getting to the stage where specialisms are becoming blurred and they cross-over with others and merge.

JK: I think that's a wider thing than just the pedagogy, I mean the digital, I don't think we have any idea of what that means yet, we are just at the beginning. With the BA students on the elective, I introduce it by saying "Look, this is just like discovering a whole new land and we're just on the beach and the rules that previously existed have gone, it's like the opposite of what we thought, we cant use the maps that we

previously used. The rules and experiences from the past have got us to this point, but actually there's so many new possibilities here that we have to be careful not to try and impose the old maps onto this new place where gravity works opposite.

When it comes to art and design it challenges every one of these disciplines and separations that we have. My gut feeling is that in what was traditionally thought of as design understands that a little bit more than art because the computer's much more integrated into the design process – you can't actually design a magazine anymore than any other way than with the computer, you can't actually go and get a bromide done and it challenges all the disciplines and all the boundaries between the disciplines and makes very interesting connections all across it I think in the art area we are just at the beginning of all of that and it's very exciting.

Maybe this is becoming a little polemical, but if there was something that this University could really contribute to art and design, to the arts or the arts university over the next twenty, thirty years, it's this, and having a place to explore this, and it's not just the staff, it's the students and the staff together, inviting the students to come and explore this journey with us and let's push this forward. It's almost like the students come and join us on this massive research project, to dig into this and see what can we do with this? Where is this going to go? Because if Shirky's right we're in for 50 years of chaos (and he's talking about economics and politics and all this kind of stuff), but I wouldn't be surprised if that's not very similar to Art and Design...

PM: I think education, art and design certainly have a role to play in that don't they? And it takes us full circle in a way because, I'm sure your experience is the same as mine, that if we give students the skills like reflective activity, to be able to think quickly, to develop ideas and become aware of how they think, then those are the skills that allow us to unlock that...

JK: It's like, is it Phil Race said about reflective learning, it is about giving you the skills *so you know exactly what to do in a situation where you don't know what to do!* That's the point of it isn't it? Drawing on all those skills so you can say "OK, I know what to do!" and you kind of improvise, but it's an improvisation where you are drawing on all your experience and the people around you, you develop that skill and it becomes a natural thing to do. And art and design, particularly art, with its traditional boundaries, and again maybe I'm being a little idealistic here, but isn't that part of the point here, just being a little bit ahead, questioning and challenging?

PM: Taking Risks?

JK: Taking the risk, maybe taking it a little too far, but saying, OK I have learnt this from this. And design within this kind of educational setting where at this point you don't have to worry about the client. Yes, you've got to consider those kind of issues but the time to challenge it, to make mistakes and think, but it was worth that exploration down that line. But that also challenges the very concept of the Institution, so again, was it Lawrence Lessig or Clay Shirky again, it's a brilliant talk he did it on TED about 2005, Just after Flickr had started, and it's this brilliant talk about Flickr, even though what he said then is so out of date by now, but it really makes the point about Institutions, I forget exactly... but the Institution is this body that's here but it's walled and if you wanna get the experts you have to get them in, inside your walls and then you wanna build protective walls around it, because that's your property and you have to invest heavily, financially it's expensive. But by definition, by building

these walls around the experts, you cannot get all the experts, there will always be some outside and he used the example of Flickr and decided to look for photographs of the Mermaid Parade in New York that they have in Coney Island.

PM: Oh yeah, I know about this, I've read this bit of the book...

JK: So if you wanted to get a photograph of this Parade, you'd have to hire a photographer, now if you want to get lots of pictures of that, you would have to hire loads of photographers, but you will never be able to employ all the photographers who are there. But he just went on Flickr to all the photos tagged with Mermaid Parade, basically he was able to create this 'long tail' graph, which is the classic picture of these sort of things; a small number of people took a lot of pictures but a huge number of people took one, two, or three pictures and normally they're not considered, but actually, in this way of collaborating, its not inside the boundaries of any Institution, but because Flickr is becoming this loose collaboration place, it might be that one person took one photo and that this photo is exactly the photo you're after. There is no other structure in history that has allowed us to find that one picture that might be the exact one. The fact that this person has only taken one photo means they are not in the Institution, and that then challenges the nature of what a University is, you know, do we even need the structures we are talking about, that exist here. This is way beyond my..., I am not management and wouldn't want to be either, but these things are challenged by this, the very structure we are working within is challenged by the very structures we are exploring. I think this is a positive, but it does create a lot of fear, because if you build big walls and you have spent a lot of money building big walls, then if people are digging tunnels underneath it then it's a little bit scary!

PM: But I guess through Wikipedia, those things are already being tested...

JK: There's that guy, David Weinberger is it? He gives that great example – Human Beings default to a position of Closed is Safe, Open is Dangerous. You know so there are two business models, one is you can spend millions of pounds getting the best editors, the best writers, to build up the greatest encyclopedia the world has ever seen, but it will cost you millions of pounds. But because you have paid that, everything will be accurate, it will be the very best thing and the second business model is, there is a website, put what you want on it, and the default position is, that will be dangerous, that will be bad, you know closed is safer, but actually Wikipedia has proved the opposite, yes of course there are problems on the edges, but they are only on the edges, they are actually very small problems. You now have the greatest collection of human knowledge that the world has ever seen in this one place for tiny amounts of money because with open, yes there are dangers, but actually it's proved that there can be more positives.

That challenges the structures like this, it challenges layers of management, it challenges how you actually organize all of this and if nothing else it challenges how open we should be with our material and what it is we do. I don't think we go as far as completely open, you know, I think creative commons is the way to go and that gives us a safe framework to use and you can choose at what level you want to do things. And actually it does fit to the whole research theories, you know with the AHRC, one of the key things is if you are funded for something is how are you going to disseminate it? That becomes a vital part and isn't this a great way, to get it out as wide as possible.

So yeah it challenges art and design, it challenges education, It challenges our structures, it all sounds a bit revolutionary that, doesn't it really! (Laughs)

PM: That's great, thanks Jonathan; I think we should leave it there, it a good place to wrap it up!

Interview with Paul Lowe [08.06.10]
Course Director, MA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography
London College of Communication

PM: So perhaps we could start with your current role and how you came to use technology enhanced learning?

PL: Right, sure. Well I am a practitioner, I spent 20 years working as a professional photographer commercially in news and current affairs and so I have been involved in using technology in my practice for all that time, we were using digital scanners and wire machines that sent 300k files in 3 separations over 9600 baud modems that took 45 minutes at the beginning of the 1990's. So I have kind of grown up with technology, you know, I had a Mac from when I graduated in 1986. I almost think it's irrelevant to talk about it as technology as a separate thing to just what you do to what you do, for me it's always been one of the tools, one of the things that's part of our life really, so that to separate it out as a separate realm is misleading.

With my professional practice I was constantly using technology and when the web came along, as a research tool it was fantastic, to find out what was going on in the world and writing story proposals, email obviously, instant messaging and other technologies as they emerged became central to my professional, and for that matter, private and personal life as well. Also, having a website and the move to digitisation, first of all scanning all my pictures and then moving on to digital capture and dissemination. So as I say it has been part of my practice and my personal and professional life – for pretty much my entire working career.

When I made the shift from full time practice to more or less full time education one of the things I came in wanting to do was to try to engage with an online environment for delivering the course as well. I had done quite a bit of work on developing some resources for an online course run by the Royal Press Photo Foundation and we had done a lot of work thinking about how you might deliver a course like that and we thought about how you might use email before online conferencing really took off. So I had spent some time thinking about how this might work in this kind of environment already.

So when I came to UAL it was almost part of my initial role and job description that we would try to launch some form of online learning environment. We first of all had to get the face to face MA that we run up and running first and we got that validated and after we had run that for three years I decided to try and run the online version, and the thing I wanted to do from the very beginning was to use live web-conferencing as the core of the course so it wasn't going to be essentially an asynchronous discussion forum, an email based thing, although they would form elements of it, what I wanted to do was re-create that intensity of experience of a live face to face environment with tutorials, lecture series, seminars and all that kind of thing. So with that in mind, in fact it was one of those fortuitous moments, I think it was at the first Designs on e-learning Conference I went to here I guess four years ago now, there were stalls with I guess three or four conferencing software suppliers on them, there was Wimba²³ and a couple of others. I had a look at them all and the

²³ Wimba is software for online education, more detailed info available at <http://www.wimba.com/>

Wimba guy seemed to be the most interesting and their platform seemed to be the best. Essentially at this point we had to find a solution pretty quickly as we were due to be starting the course fairly soon! So I did a deal with Wimba and CLTAD²⁴ so that we could get a trial version of Wimba in at the college on the basis that it would be run for my group. So that's how we got started using the Wimba Platform for web-conferencing.

We then trialled a couple of things that we wanted to use on the online course on the full-time course first, we started using blogs, we started using a bit of social book-marking and built up an experience of how to use them, what to use them for. So when we launched the online course we had already developed a bit of experience of using some of the platforms we wanted to use.

What we have built, or what we are continually in the process of building and re-designing is what I would call a Virtual Collaborative Learning Environment, a VCLE or a CLVE, whatever you want to call it, I haven't quite written the acronym yet! But it's a sort of virtual commons or what Jay Cross would call a Learnscape, a series of overlapping spaces in which the group – and I use that term loosely – it's the participants in the program, it's the staff, it's any ancillary people, it's the external people who come in, the ALs, the lecturers, the students, where we can all come together and collaboratively discuss practice and work on enhancing pretty much everybody's practice really mine as much as theirs really...

[At this point we move to another space so there is a short break in the interview]

PL: Yes, so what I think is very important about that space is there is no one platform or technology that works overall in that sense, I think one of the mistakes with many online programmes is that they try to get one platform to do everything. I think it's the same as with any physical space, say into the University, you couldn't teach everything in the studio or in the library or in the corridor, you have to have a variety of different sorts of spaces that have different kinds of functionalities, different affordances, different temporalities and you need to provide a variety of different sorts of spaces because the students are different you know. Some people are going to want, in the same way as in a physical environment, they will want to sit in the library on their own with a book, somebody else will be in the bar talking with everyone else, some will be in the studio working on a piece of machinery or something like that.

So you need to give a variety of spaces and I think that with the work we've done that with our course in terms of the course evaluation, has really borne that out so we've got a series of different activities and tools, you know Twitter, Ning, Wimba and so on and so forth and the feedback we have got is very interesting because certain platforms, and Twitter is a very good example, some people give it 0 out of 10 for how much they use it and 0/10 for how good they think it is, some people give it 10/10 for the same criteria, so while the average might be 6/10, actually the patterns of usage are very different some people use it a lot, some people don't use it at all.

That's the evidence I think that you have to give people these kinds of spaces, because if you only give them one or two options your limiting the options for what they might be able to do and how they might be able to interact and collaborate and so on. So I think that's quite important to think that, you know, that you need to

²⁴ CLTAD is the Centre for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design, just in case :-)

provide a range of opportunities particularly on a fully online course, I think it's potentially different on a blended course or a face-to-face (F2F) course where you might just take one for a very specific use. But even with that, it's like anything; there is no one size fits all, where one approach is going to work for every single person.

So what I think we have tried to engage in is a kind of design for evolution I suppose, like a living curriculum, so we are constantly looking at what we are doing, how we are doing it, why we are doing it and how we might enhance and improve that. And we are very much doing that in consultation with the students, because again, we are taking this adaptation or interpretation of Wenger's Community of Practice (COP) idea and trying to make that work within an academic space.

Of course its impossible to get rid of all the hierarchy, particularly when it comes to the hierarchy of assessment for example, but certainly in terms of the interaction between the participants in the programme, the staff and the students, we try to as much as possible make that discussion of equals and give them a voice in what is going on. So we have regular meetings once a term for example where we talk about the content of the course and what we are delivering and we ask them to tell us if there are things we are not telling you about that you want to know about? Are there things you think are missing? What is working well what is not? and a lot of that is based around the business models and professional practice. But then also talking about the actual technology we are using to actually deliver the course, So we say 'How is Wimba going?', 'What do you think about Ning?' you know, 'The discussion forum has dropped off recently why do you think that is?', 'What about Google Wave, you know, how's it been going?' So there's a kind of process of constant iteration, discussion and its very much done together and I think we have very much followed Wenger's digital habitat²⁵ idea as a kind of guide book, you need to negotiate and you need the kind of technology stewards. I think you do need people who understand the needs of the group and the potentials afforded by the technology, but you need to negotiate that with the group. I have got a very good case study of that which I will come onto in a moment about how that actually worked in practice.

I think one of the issues with this approach is a question about how scaleable this might be. I mean obviously it is scaleable because some of the case studies at IBM for example are huge but when you are using it within an academic context to deliver a course, I mean it is certainly working on the size of course we are working on – a postgraduate course – but I don't know it would work with a larger group, I think it would be interesting to try it, but I wouldn't like to say that is absolutely scalable and that it would work for everybody, but certainly for us and I think that what it does is it does two things. One I think it validates what we are doing, the sense that what we are getting is very intimate and we are getting continuous student feedback, and they are quite vociferous about that, so if things aren't going well then they will let us know about it and visa versa. But secondly I think it gives the students that sense of control and empowerment. What begins to happen, and I think it is exactly what you want to happen, is that idea of legitimate participation and that shifting, I mean most of them are already quite well established in practice, they're kind of enhancing each others practice and forming that community of practice on the course that maps onto that broader community of practice that they are aspiring to become part of or that they are already part of in that broader professional world. So there's that sort of overlap of what Wenger describes as an articulation between the course and the broader

²⁵ Wenger, E., White, N., Smith, J.D. *Digital Habitats, stewarding technology for communities*, (2009) CPSquare

profession. You could do a drawing I guess of overlapping circles to show how they interact.

One issue, and I think this is probably true of quite a lot of innovations like this or experiments like this is that it has been predominantly driven by me, my course team have followed along with it, but it has been driven by me. However I would say that the students have bought into it quite a lot and I have one very interesting example of that. I gave them a talk about how the course operates and we start off at the very beginning by saying that that is the kind of approach we want to take and we describe the COP approach, so it's quite explicit to them that that is what we are trying to achieve and one of the students posted the archive of that talk up onto his own blog saying "this is the course that I am on and I think its really interesting that we are using this kind of approach" so there is this sense that they actually buy into this kind of approach, which I think is right, if you are trying to have this kind of community based approach then the community has to accept that that is what its doing. We are not banging them over the head with Wenger theory, but it's about trying to get the balance right so that it's not too covert or too overt really.

Anyway I think that process of iteration and evolution and making that quite organic so that it emerges out of the needs of the community is really important. I think Wenger made a really good point at *the Mediating Boundaries*²⁶ conference that the COP theory started off as a sort of interpretive or evaluative approach then became instrumentalised, you know, became turned into: "I would like twelve COPs please and I would like them by Thursday and how much is it going to cost?" So I think that you always need to bear that in mind that although there are clear things that you can do to build, enhance or nurture a COP you also have to be aware that it has to have its own energy and its own incentives as well as it were. So it has to keep that organic quality to it, if you are just imposing it, then it is no longer a COP, it becomes this externally imposed model.

PM: That covers quite a lot of what I wanted to speak to you about actually, but I wonder if we can take a step back briefly because I am curious to know how your fellowship helped you develop the work you are doing?

PL: Well, in terms of my own professional development, the number of things I have been funded for has been fantastic, and I think we talked earlier on about whether these fellowships do really buy you out of your job and I think they buy you out of bits of it, but obviously its not as if you disappear off into the ether to some ivory cloud, but undoubtedly they gave me in two ways, they gave me a certain amount of time, but they also validate what you are doing in a very effective way, because you've gone through a competitive bidding process, which is essentially the same as getting a paper accepted at a conference, you know, its validating your idea and concept.

So in terms of my own self-confidence and self-belief it has been very important. And then in terms of the time its given me to go out and look and research and think and then write up often the results of that, they have been very, very important, absolutely essential and I was very fortunate in that I got, as I think you have as well, a series of graded ones that got progressively bigger and bigger and ended up as a full fellowship as you've done. I think they really did allow me to find the space to engage with issues in a deep way and think about them and research them and I think that

²⁶ Mediating Boundaries Conference, London College of Communication, 12th May 2010.
<http://collaborativetools4bce.jiscinvolve.org/wp/events/mediating-boundaries/> (last accessed 28.09.10)

the one I concentrated most on was using blogging for reflective practice, but the work I did on that has absolutely underpinned everything else I have done because that's how I came across Schön and Reflective Practice and then Wenger and then looked a lot at Jenny Moon and all these kind of pedagogic areas and I think for me what was really important about that journey was the sense in which the theory validated the practice rather than the other way round.

For me, what I found very powerful about reading Schön or Wenger was recognising in what they were saying, things that I was already doing myself, whether in my teaching practice or my professional practice. So there was a real resonance there and that's why I found those theories or approaches so powerful when it came to trying to refine the approach we had been taking on the course. So as you know there is a lot of great stuff in Schön about the tutorial experience, so I kind of took that and worked that through.

So they have been very valuable in that sense of my own personal and professional development. I think I have been quite lucky because I then got a secondment at CLTAD, but one of the problems with secondments and fellowships is that if and when they finish, you are still interested in that territory and you still want that time to think about it, and so how do you find that? and it becomes the problem of how you manage that, so you are then looking for that next point as to how you find that space. But I think that's very similar to many research projects, where the project finishes and is it sustainable, does that work all just dry up or does it continue.

PM: That's really useful and echoes my experience, fellowships or funding act as a driving force for the research really, they allow you to put your ideas into practice...

PL: Yes, they really give you the space to think, to write and to reflect and so on...

PM: Am I right in thinking that for your Fellowship you use Ning?

PL: Yes, what we do is try to take an approach where, wherever possible we use platforms that are available to the broader community, so if we can find something that the industry is using then we would use that if we can, particularly if it is open source or free, and one of my issues with a lot of academically focussed learning technology is that the day you graduate you never see that again and if you are trying to develop digitally literate life long learners, spending a lot of time trying to get them to use something that once they leave they will no longer be able to use any more seems a little bit perverse. I think its important to not get hung up on an individual piece of software, but to look at how different kinds of interactive virtual spaces operate, so how Wikis work, how blogs work, how social networking sites work, rather than saying OK, Ning vs. Facebook or Ning versus ELG, once you actually think about that side of things, you will find certain nuances, but the valuable thing to spend your time thinking about is what kind of different uses these things might have in learning, teaching and pedagogy and so on and so forth, because you are then (and this was a great line that came out of the Wimba conference) you are platform agnostic, because you are focussing your energy on thinking about the conceptual meta level of how to collaborate virtually, not on, does this blogging platform have more features on it? or so on. Sure you need to look at those things, but I think that a lot of the energy in looking at technology gets spent, and I think wasted in many ways on that level of minutiae of comparing feature sets and not thinking about...

PM: The problem?

PL: The problem, you know, what is the issue? What are we trying to do or to achieve? I think what I might call the more flexible or agile approach is, if there is something out there which is going to solve your problem today, that you can get access to and you can start using relatively simply, then do it! Then if something better comes along a bit later, either the institution level, or the Open Source level, then you migrate to that platform. So I have always had this idea that with whatever we build or use, we will put enough energy to make it work today, but not so much that we cant abandon it tomorrow...

PM: That was the reasoning behind the question really, to some extent. With e-learning implementations you choose the tool that is best going to answer the problem, but there may be issues with free or open source tools – with Ning for example it is moving towards a paid model isn't it?

PL: Well for our course we were about to go for the ad-free, paid for model anyway and actually the paid for model is cheaper than other options. So what we are going to do having chosen Ning initially, and it is another great example of why conferences are good, I went to the Solstice Conference a couple of years ago, saw a really good demonstration of somebody using Ning, saw one of somebody using ELG, at that time you could only host ELG yourself and it was impossible to get space on the University servers to install trial software. Ning was straight out of the box, very easy to customise, you could get a site up and running in five minutes or so, and it didn't have everything we wanted, but it had most of the feature set we wanted. At that point we had Blackboard and we also had a course blog.

We realised that the course blog wasn't really doing what we wanted it to do, and the students realised that blackboard wasn't really working either, so we wanted something that was going to have elements of both and Ning basically filled that gap very well. It's a great example again of how we did that with the group. So, as a the group we looked at Ning and said 'Is this the kind of space we want to build?' We put it together and it wasn't perfect but it wasn't bad and so collectively we actually built that space, we chose the look and feel of it together. We got the students together and said what colour ways do we want, what font do we want?

PM: So the fact that it became a paid for thing didn't make it prohibitive?

PL: For one individual course like ours it is going to cost 150 quid a year, its not excessive at all. I think the important thing about it is: what have we learnt about the kind of environment that we need that works? What sorts of functionalities and affordances does it need? Because that then feeds in to any future discussion about what the VLE, CLE, whatever the learning environment might be. And you obviously know the work that [others are] doing with Drupal²⁷ but this very frustrating process of not being able to get space on the University servers to put in test installations has always been frustrating over the last couple of years I have to say, its been a major hindrance or holding back of the things that I've tried to do. That was one of the things about Ning; it was basically just there you know, you didn't have to fill in any complicated forms you know to get it. The same is true of the blogs, the students

²⁷ www.drupal.org, Official homepage of the open source content management system...

themselves almost entirely choose to host their own blog, whether they host it themselves or whether they use Wordpress²⁸.

So the decision making process is quite tight on the course, but it is very much done in consultation with the students, so it's not that I say we are only going to do this, it's that collaboratively we say, well what's not quite working. The best case I have got of this the way we start to use Google Wave²⁹ and I shall send you the Action research project on that because I think it's quite an interesting example. Basically, we kind of identified something that wasn't quite working which was the process of researching their major project ideas, we wanted a space where they could kind of pitch their idea and talk about it and brainstorm it and we tried their blogs, which was OK, and we tried emails and so on and obviously we had the tutorial, but something wasn't quite right, wasn't quite working, you know the discussion forums weren't quite right for that either. We started using Twitter as a sort of a, what I call the kind of water cooler moment, short exchanges of bits of interesting gossip or titbits, web links or news and we have a course hash tag for that so we can find the exchanges and so on. Anyway, we just introduced that at the end of last year, and we've also had a phased introduction, so that we don't start the new cohort with every single tool on the first day, we sort of bring things in. So we start off with the Web-Conferencing and then Ning and then we bring in Twitter and then we bring in blogs. Then in the second phase we bring in Wikis, so it kind of cumulatively builds up so we are not hitting them with everything at once because it is too overwhelming I think.

Anyway, Google Wave was launched and you know there was a lot of hype around it and a lot of buzz around it and I queued up for my Google Wave invitation and so on and so forth and then it arrived and there was that kind of Hiatus where, you know I've got a wave account, but no one to wave to! I thought, well it's kind of interesting but I had seen a bit of stuff about using it for project management and so on but I certainly didn't think it was ready to be deployed onto the course. But then three or four of the students who had Wave Accounts said 'Hey, this Google Wave thing looks pretty cool! I think this might be quite useful for us, let's try it out!' And we immediately realised that's where actually you could actually solve that problem of the brainstorming moment as it were. So we ran it as a trial last term and it went really, really well, it far exceeded my expectations of it, so and now running it as a full blown part of the course. Again it's not compulsory, not everyone uses it, but there are a significant proportion of students who do and the feedback from them is very, very strong. Essentially what we use it for is a space for them to brainstorm their project ideas.

What's happened pedagogically which is absolutely tremendous is; it started off where they would post their idea and wait for the tutor to validate the idea and then other people would then start to interact as well. But it was still very much based on the tutor verifying the concept. What has happened really quite quickly, within weeks of starting to use it, is that the bulk of the validation now is peer to peer and the tutors voice gets progressively less and less. And so you would see at the beginning, 'Well, I don't know what Paul thinks of this but I think it's a good idea.' Or 'I am going to wait and see what Paul thinks...' and then that disappears and then we get from others 'I

²⁸ Wordpress is an open source content management system often used as a blog publishing application

²⁹ Google Wave is a live, shared space on the web where people can discuss and work together using richly formatted text, photos, videos, maps, and more. ... (info available from <http://wave.google.com/about.html>)

think this idea's really great or I think this idea's terrible or 'have you thought about looking at...' and then some stuff that even goes beyond that to a more meta level of 'I think overall your work is really strong' or 'I think actually you need to focus more on the way you are making these psychological portraits' So it becomes this really quite mature level of interaction. From my point of view in terms of pedagogy that's fantastic, because they are validating each others judgements and learning how to qualitatively assess project ideas and so on and so forth. My voice has got progressively less and less visible in that process.

So I think that's a really good example of how you can create a virtual community that's able to address its own needs and organically solve them, we did it together. We've got another really good example with the Wikis where we used the wiki as a research platform so they would each post their research notes and collaborate and share ideas and so on and that worked very well. The group then, without us initiating this, set up a space on the Wiki to collaborate on organising the final show, they did the whole kind of project management for doing that using the wiki, it was one space where everyone could come together, find out what was going on and so that was great in terms of tools.

PM: That all sounds like fantastic stuff, we mentioned... again, with a lot of the enthusiasts that I have spoken to, that are into technology enhanced learning, you find that it really helps to develop student autonomy, peer learning and things like this. On your recent presentation for 'Learn at Lunch' and you've touched on it today, you mentioned something called 'living curriculum', this idea that when you give students the chance to reflect, work with their peers, they often start to bump up or rub against the curriculum in ways we may not have expected, not bumping along the bottom, but actually pushing at the top end of expectations.

PL: Yes, absolutely, and we've had that with our current cohort, where they said that they thought that the theory sessions weren't tough enough, weren't pushing them enough, yeah,

PM: But how have you dealt with this idea of living curriculum, is it something that you see as possible, is there room for negotiation...for students to develop their own learning outcomes?

PL: I think there is on lots of courses, and with a masters course absolutely, because inherently the largest thing that they do is a self negotiated project, and they come to the tutors, and you know every project is different and part of the tutor student exchange is us trying to help them with that specific project that is very unique to them, so clearly that is negotiating the curriculum on a very personal level.

But on a more broader course level, and I'll give you an example, our second phase of the course, in the middle of the course, it's effectively our research methodologies unit, we call it critical perspectives on documentary practice, and the way we do that is at the beginning of that term we all get together and we say, OK we are going to collaboratively research a topic that is relevant to the concerns of what we are doing, so we are going to come up together with a field and area, then you are each going to go off on your own and research a bit of that and come back to present that to the group.

So for example, two years ago we collaboratively decided that we were going to research the area of 'citizen photojournalism', the rise of Flickr and you know the democratisation of journalism is really interesting and it has presented some really big challenges to the established industry. So we chose that as our field of enquiry and then each student goes off and does their own bit of independent research into a small area of that, and then that all gets brought back together at the end onto the Wiki and they all do presentations to each other, so in one day everyone gets to see 16 fantastic presentations and by the end of the process we have all learned something really interesting about this theme.

Now at the beginning of the term I don't know what that topic's going to be! We know we are going to be delivering a set of research methodologies, in terms of how do you go out to the web, how do you navigate your own web resources, how do you use Google Scholar, what is the value of a blog, can you trust them and all this kind of thing. We know we have got that basic skeleton, but the topic we are going to investigate, we don't know what that's going to be at the beginning of the term. So we then have to create almost in real time, some sessions that are going to address that topic. So what we do is we, as a course team we obviously have some experience, but we also have good connections with the industry, so for example this term they have chosen humanitarian photography, so for instance we went out to NGOs and got them to come in and present. So that's what I am talking about when I talk about Negotiated Curriculum. So the course document, the validated document, has a fairly generic, you know 'you will engage in a group research project' but the specifics of what that is will change every year. The philosophy behind that is that from my perspective is that on a masters level course is that you have to have what I call a T shaped approach so, there are certain things you draw using very broad based approach, to give them a sense of a breadth of knowledge, but there are certain things you drill down to in great depth. So that's how we have approached that. With broad brush strokes, such as the general research methodologies, we take a topic and it can be any topic and drill down into that in quite a lot of depth to develop a bit of unique independent research. By doing that you learn how to do that in anything else, so that works particularly well at Masters level.

So I think one of the things I have typically tried to do, I don't think I am at what Wesch calls 'the bleeding edge', I think I am just behind the cutting edge. So I have gone out and looked at what others have done who are innovating and taken their approach and adapted it and modified it, so that approach with the learning research methods model is based on Mike Wesch's Purpose Driven Research approach, which he's doing with undergraduate students who'd never met each other before, and he had incredibly successful results with.

So one of the things I think you have to be doing is constantly scanning the horizon of your practice really and seeing what people are doing, both in terms of professional practice, but also in terms of the pedagogic approach to the teaching and learning practice. Looking at what's going on, looking at what has worked, but hasn't been fully deployed yet.

PM: What's really interesting about the example that you've just given is that it is almost an example of, and this has been coming up a lot as I have been speaking to people for the fellowship, is that people aren't just using technology tools, but they are using models of how technology works and

applying them to face to face teaching, so what you are describing is almost a crowd sourcing approach to teaching...

PL: Absolutely, well that's exactly Wesch's model I mean, that's basically his idea, you know, his way of working is exactly that, what he does and we do that as well, the first exercise is to scan the landscape of that subject, choose what you want to research, each student then goes off and reads five academic articles or whatever that might be and produces a five hundred word précis. Each student then reads that 500 word précis, so within a couple of weeks, the whole cohort of students have read the equivalent of 80 papers or articles that might be on the subject, so you are collaboratively scanning the research horizon. He's gone a bit further than us because it's a more academic course, while ours is a more practical course but then out of that you can draw the key themes and then try to see what are the gaps in the literature and then go and attack those gaps and so on and so forth.

So yes, absolutely and I think that goes back to the point I made earlier and if I didn't then I will make it again, that what is important is this question of pedagogy and then you find a way of enhancing that through the technology, rather than starting off with, and I think that JISC... have you read the JISC LLIDA report? Learning Literacies in a Digital Age, it just came out recently, its good and one of their main recommendations is that technology should be employed on authentic learning situations, so for example you shouldn't have a class in 'this is how to use a Wiki, it should be 'were going to do a research project and we are going to use a Wiki as the way of doing it' and you will learn how to use a Wiki while you are doing it. Its one of the problems that we do too often here, with staff development in IT skills, you know, we are going to teach you how to do excel spreadsheets! Why? Teach how to run a course credit system whatever, or marking system and then show how to use excel as part of that. So this idea of creating authentic or realistic learning experiences that are enhanced by technology is what we are trying to do.

PM: I will have to get that Mike Wesch reference off you, because I found myself doing that this year without being aware of that. I had a problem where I had to deliver a session in how to use Adobe Illustrator as part of a digital illustration project. I had tried to get the latest version through college so I could learn the latest version for myself, but found this difficult in the time I had. So what I did was break the software program into facets and gave pairs of students different bits to research and they gave presentations on what they learned to each other...

PL: Well that's great! That's one of the things we have been thinking about doing because one of the problems we have been having and I am sure you've had the same is very much in the area of software skills, we don't have the time or the energy or the budgets to deliver those, so we are thinking about that, how we can get the students to teach each other, a bit like well 'I can do this' or 'I know how to do that', so this kind of session where one person will teach them what they know and someone else teaches them what they know and they are basically teaching each other, which I don't think is cheating, I think that's peer to peer learning.

PM: Its also learning how to learn isn't it? - One of the higher skills. This problem (of teaching technical skills) has been a bugbear of mine for a number of years, so I am glad to have found a successful solution!

PM: We've covered your interest in COP and how that has influenced your writing of the online version of the MA, perhaps we can talk about your interests here in a wider sense and about the mediating boundaries conference that you set up with Etienne Wenger at LCC (when) What's your reflection on that event now?

PL: Well what I think I will do is go back a step and talk about the whole process of working with Jisc, cause I think we haven't really talked about it and I think there's quite a good point to be made, and I'll finish that off with the Wenger conference.

Basically what happened was that we realized that what we were doing on the MA was quite good, and that we had basically developed a model that could be expanded out to the broader professional community, and I had always felt that with my practice community that there was something missing at the level of a really focused, intense, intelligent, critical debate around what we were doing in the industry, and we felt that we could potentially use the lessons we had learned in using the Webinars on the course to try and engender that debate, to try and act as the catalyst for that.

We were looking around for some funding and we found this particular stream, this JISC BCE, business community engagement scheme, which were 9 projects each of 30k to trial online collaborative tools for BCE. So we put together a bid for it and the bid was actually quite lightweight and quite fun actually as they had this thing called 'pitch and effect' where you basically went and pitched your idea to them in Birmingham.

We were very fortunate in that we got one of those nine grants. The proposal was basically to set up an online, virtual, community of practice for the photojournalism industry that would bring together academics, aspiring entrants to the profession, be they students or early entrants, established practitioners who use photography and people who write and critique photography.

The idea was I guess to tap into a latent community of practice because I think that within the photographic industry there is a community of practice there, but it is not as well defined or formed as it would be at IBM for example. So the program is just coming up to the end of the funding year, but essentially what we have done is run a series of webinars with invited guests, quite often in association with other quite well known web-based associations, and we have run them about once every two months or so over the last twelve months and it's over all been very successful. I think we have realized that we haven't quite created a complete community of practice, but what we have done is provide a very useful function to a COP. This has also then provided a function to our course and this is where, which I think Wenger was talking about, that this is a great example of a COP and a course articulating against each other and in a way we are aware that we have become a critical friend to the industry because we can give that kind of academic questioning to the discourse and we can say, why are you doing things like this, what are the ethical issues and so forth. So that has gone very well and I met Wenger this time last year at the iPed conference and again it was one of those wonderful conference moments, and it's why I am such a big believer in conferences, because I think if you use them well, they can be fantastic accelerants and ideas factories and so on, but Wenger was the Keynote and I put the paper in for the conference because he was the Keynote. My session was immediately after his keynote and so he stayed in the room and we got talking at

the end of the presentation and we ended up having lunch together which was a fantastic kind of 'moment with the guru' and he's a very nice guy, a very funny Swiss American. He runs this seven week workshop in COP once or twice a year which is run online with his co-researchers and so I did that last September which was an intense online learning experience looking at COPS.

On the back of that I got invited, by one of the people that had been involved in that, to present at a conference in May at Birmingham University on COP in Education at which Wenger was the Keynote again. And it was like, well if he's going to be in England on the Monday maybe we can get him down to do something at UAL, at the LCC, and this also coincided with the re-framing practice project that Alison Shreeve put together at the end of the Clip Cetl, do you know this? Basically it was the parting shot of Clip Cetl and Alison had put together this bid and about 8 or 9 of us got a little bit of money to go off and do a project looking at either Activity Theory or Communities of Practice theory.

So I said to Alison, 'Look Wenger is in town, shall we try to invite him, you know we realized that we could invite him for two days. So I pitched to JISC and I pitched to Alison and they both said yes, I negotiated with Etienne and we got a price plan that would work and we basically brought him down to UAL for two days. We had a one day, very intimate workshop with him with CLIP CETL and the second day was the mediating Boundaries event.

So it was something I cooked up with the team at JISC. The JISC program I have to say has been fantastic, what I have been very impressed with is the way they have run this as a portfolio of research projects and there have been very regular meetings and events where they brought us all together, there has been a lot of support from them, it hasn't just been, here's your money, go and do something, come back in twelve months, you know! So this sense of building up a community within the projects has also been very strong.

So out of the meetings and discussions we had this issue of Brokerage had emerged as a key issue and the idea of boundaries and how you negotiate those boundaries and how virtual spaces can help in that encounter. So that is how the mediating boundaries event came about. Because it was JISC the focus was on technology and also on community and business engagement and it was a chance to showcase some of the things we had been working on with that thing as well. But before the day we had also been thinking about exploring this un-conference format, a slightly more flexible fluid conference based format where its much more explicit that there is going to be networking, discussion and debate and exchange, rather than that happening at lunchtimes and in the evenings in a very unstructured and informal and accidental way, the idea was to try to, you know it's the kind of 'World Café' or 'Ideas Café' idea. I think the format worked really well, it had some of the formality and excitement of a good keynote, but also the sense of going off and working in small groups and drilling down into some of the issues. So that's how the day came about and essentially it was funded by Jisc, who put the money in to cover Etienne's fee and a few of the other running costs. It was put together fairly cheaply, you know, including Etienne's fee the whole thing cost two and a half grand or something in the end.

In terms of it's impact, JISC loved it, we had 98 people or something from a wide range of institutions and people did some very valuable work that day. One of the

problems I think with this whole conference circuit is, you know, you put your paper in, which obviously it becomes a kind of system, an eco-system that has to survive, but then it does become very expensive, because your overheads get bumped up with peoples expectations, but because this was a free event, peoples expectations were lower, so when you have just got things like a sandwich for lunch you weren't that bothered you know.

So I think it was a good example of how you can produce essentially what was a COP event on a shoestring, really. If it hadn't of been Wenger and we hadn't of had to hire chairs we could have done the whole thing for a hundred quid! In fact we could have done it for nothing, because we had done another event tied into the open-i community earlier in the year, which was looking at the visual representation of the developing world, and that didn't cost us anything because we sold sandwiches for a pack for two pounds each and gave the money to charity.

PM: Going off at a tangent slightly one of the issues I have with the conference thing is that once they are over and everyone leaves at the end of the day or the end of the week, the debate is pretty much closed really...

PL: Yes, I think that's right and its something we can learn from some of the online conferences really

PM: A more blended approach to conferences would be good really...

PL: Well what I thought would be very interesting and if I was going to organize my own large scale conference was that you would have the two days of the actual conference, but in advance of that you would have some form of social networking site where you could begin to see who was going to be there and what their interests might be, but also a Webinar event that would set out some of the themes of the conference to act as a preamble to it and then after the conference have perhaps another event maybe one or two weeks later that could act as a tail end to it. With a couple of the ones I've been to they've used Ning for example as a community site. People have registered and logged on and said this is who I am and this is what I want to do. I think we are still experimenting a lot with the format. I think quite a lot has been done with the non-profit sector in looking at the un-conference format and there are also the e-learning people who are looking at it and how to approach it much more. There have been some very interesting posts recently by, was it George Siemens? Well, a couple of the e-learning American bloggers talking about, 'Why don't we have a conference where the point of it is actually to build something, to achieve something, because if you think about it and you've got a hundred people going to attend a conference, most of them are just sitting in a room listening. If you take that hundred people and you say to them, 'right, we are going to build something in two days and you all put your energy into, you know, it's a little like Clay Shirkey's³⁰ idea about Cognitive Surplus, you know? If you took the cognitive surplus of a conference and built something with that, then you could do something really amazing.

I think the Cognitive Surplus idea is a really interesting one applied to our environment and a great example of that is the PGCert, the cognitive surplus, or the value of the PGCert and the research it has produced is really powerful, but nothing happens to it and all those research projects disappear.

³⁰ more info on Clay Shirky can be found at <http://www.shirky.com/> (28.09.10)

One of the main things I have felt with teaching and learning (T+L) is particularly at Masters level, students are doing really great pieces of work, but most of it never gets seen by anyone, apart from them and their tutors. That is the Mike Wesch approach I think is that he is producing authentic research where he is the co-researcher with the students - I don't want to use the word students really – participants, and you're producing something that the world is actually going to find interesting to see and talk about. His Youtube videos have been seen by six or seven million people, you know, talk about impact!

PM: Again, you touched on this a little earlier and its not part of my formal questions, but it raises an interesting point. This idea of collaborative learning or collaborative knowledge creation again might raise interesting questions particularly for assessment or for understanding how learning happens; I wonder if there is going to be some need for manouvre on that.

PL: I think it's a very interesting question and it cuts not just through T+L but also research outputs, how you evaluate the activity that academics engage in. But this whole issue around assessment is really troublesome, its troublesome knowledge because all of your instinct is guiding you towards wanting to get the student to understand what is good and what is bad themselves and to generate that meaning for themselves and yet almost everything we do externally validates that judgment rather than internally validates it and I think it's a very tricky thing to take on board. I know David Boud, who has done a lot of work on assessment, thinks everything should be peer assessed, because the whole point of assessment should be to develop and calibrate their critical judgment.

I think one of the problems I have found as a practitioner slash academic, is how, if you are going to innovate something ... it's like dominoes, you know, you bring in this innovation but there is a cascade off that and lots of other things start to occur, so: you introduce a collaborative learning exercise in a WIKI, but then you have to think, 'well, now how am I going to assess that?' Perhaps you don't have the time or the experience or the pedagogic knowledge to work or spend six months looking at assessment or how to assess group work and I think that's a big problem at the moment and I think that's something that is missing are people who can help you with those sorts of issues relatively easily and quickly. I think that's where a community of practice model could really take-off. I think it is hard for individual members of staff to find a way to find out about something new in terms of technology or pedagogy, I think that is a really key issue at the moment. First of all there are no space to do that, you know, you can do staff development in excel but you cant do staff development in activity theory or you know setting up a community of practice or principles of action research beyond your PGCert. Once you've done your PGCert that's it and that's a real problem.

That was part of the inspiration for Learn at Lunch was to try and make something of those action research projects and to have a space where we could talk about pedagogy and share ideas and things, that's very much at the heart of the proposal I am putting together about the COP around learning technology is to provide a space where you can find out where everybody is and what they are doing and what examples we have got of good practice and share and ask questions and say 'well you know I have been doing this, what do you think about it?' You, know 'What's your experience been?' and so on.

PM: My last question relates directly to that. The Hefce e-learning strategy talks about the problematic of trying to move technology enhanced learning beyond the realms of purely the enthusiasts, and I think this idea of the Community of Practice, or whatever it is called, but this group that can help promote activities in this area, I wonder if that's one of the ways of offering synchronous and asynchronous, this sort of multi-timed space...

PL: Yes, I think temporality is very important, I think it has to be multi-temporal, it has to have that kind of mixture of temporalities, some real-time, some face to face and some asynchronous, yeah, I think so. I think we have paid quite a lot of lip service to the idea of Communities of Practice here, you hear it bandied around quite a lot at quite senior levels, but I think almost all of the literature supports the idea that, by and large they need to be sponsored and nurtured and you need a certain amount of institutional support and that's what this proposal is about really. It's interesting, it's e-learning, it's in the learning and teaching strategy, it's in the information strategy that we are all developing Communities of Practice, but put your money where your mouth is and let's see some funding and ...

PM: It seems to follow all the way through, you know, we have talked about the fact that most of the people who have implemented it (web 2.0 technology or COP) in their teaching are clear about how it helps students learn...

PL: Absolutely.

PM: ... you've touched on area where the research community, you know it raises some issues as to how research is done and how it's assessed...

PL: Yes, and how it is shared

PM: ... shared and developed. And so we should really, at staff level, be practicing what we preach at that level too.

PL: And this is exactly what the LLIDA report says, unless staff are engaging with it then how they they hope to be teaching it to students? I have been thinking about this sort of chasm and how there are the early adopter and the natives and actually part of me is beginning to think that actually it's not that the chasm can't be bridged, but that perhaps it doesn't need to be bridged, because certain staff members and certain courses are going to establish themselves in particular niches, and if your niche is 'I use technology a lot in my course' or your niche is 'this is a course that is enabled through technology' then you stay there in that little niche and you're part of the twenty per cent, but it doesn't necessarily follow that everything that goes on then has to be used by everybody. To actually think that as a matter of course bridge the chasm might not actually be that relevant when actually what you do need is to keep on supporting what these innovators are doing because in the context of what they're doing it working and it's valuable and it may be that it never does cross the chasm because it might not need to...

PM: I am tempted to agree with you...

PL: Maybe it doesn't have to because it doesn't need to...

PM: ...and it's always good to have another voice

PL: Well, it's like saying that every course should be the same, but because all of the courses aren't the same they all fit into these little niches of their own. So I think, slightly re-framing that question and saying, 'Well, what's going on in that twenty percent?' even if it never makes it to the eighty percent is still a really, really valuable activity and is important because for the people in the twenty percent, it's really enhancing them. So that group of staff and students here are getting a great experience out of it. The others aren't necessarily missing out, it's just that they are doing things in different ways, what they are doing may not be relevant applicable or scalable or whatever it might be.

Because I also think that you can worry artificially about trying to fill that chasm, as opposed to just letting that progress of time essentially bridge that chasm, essentially it's just going to happen anyway at some point and all you can do is innovate and experiment... anyway...

I am wondering if there is anything else we haven't mentioned,

PM: Well that pretty much covers all my questions...

PL: There are two things we haven't engaged with, and one, which I think is quite parochial in a sense and that is social media guidelines, I wrote a draft for Nancy on that, we haven't really gone beyond that, but I think a sense of 'what do we think as an institution is acceptable for staff and students to engage with in that kind of area?' and the second one is around this whole area of digital literacy, and this is possibly where the chasm comes in. I think we have to think about the kind of attributes that we want our graduates to have in the field of, whether you call it information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, whatever it might be, so when they graduate from here, we're confident that they are able to operate as digital citizens, what I think Beckton called 'digitally mature learners', which I quite like, because I think that whole digital natives thing is a bit of a red herring.

And I think what we should be thinking about and I think it's the 'seven pillars of learning', I think our Institution particularly is very well placed to think about an approach that is not a purely academic or a purely personal one, a sort of is, in a similar way to the way we think of a research based practice approach, you know where we're teaching them how to enquire about the world in a useful way as it were, digitally. So things like how they find information, how they filter information, how do you create new information, how do you evaluate it, how do you share that, how do you protect that, copyright, personal privacy and so on. So a series of quite generic words, you know, find, filter, evaluate, critique, connect, communicate protect, whatever it might be, that sum up almost like a workflow that you would go through as a digitally literate person in your professional life and your life long learning. And I think that idea of moving towards personal learning networks, personal environments, developing a personal learning methodology that is robust and is effective for our graduates, would be an important thing. As I said before, it's developed through situated learning experiences that use technology as part of answering a research question.

PM: That makes a lot of sense, absolutely, and what is does it what the University could do in terms of offering a critical approach, rather than

adopting it blind. In one way you could argue that in terms of the chasm we have discussed, that that might be a fantastic opportunity for the COP as well, in that if people choose not to use technology then at least that's informed and its based on a critical perspective

PL: Rather than just a luddite approach...

PM: Exactly, 'this is why I am not interested in using it', not just, 'I don't understand it!'

PL: And maybe that's a perfectly appropriate response, you know!

PM: Well we can't make (the technology) go away and it fits quite nicely, you know, we have talked about what a 21st Century cohort, but it starts to form a picture of what a 21st century University might have to become, or might need to do..

PL: Yes, and I think it will have to become multi-leveled, multi-temporal, multi-spatial almost, like I said, you wouldn't expect a University to only have a library or only to have the studios, you've got to have a variety of these sorts of spaces and it needs to replicate some of these spaces digitally as well. I think one of the biggest problems we have got at the moment is that there is not a single space that I can think of that allows people to interact horizontally, either staff or students, so there is nowhere at the moment where a student from CSM can find a student from LCC or a staff member from LCC can find a staff member from Camberwell, everything we are doing at the moment is sort of chopped up really and existing in little pockets. It maybe that the portal eventually solves some of those sorts of issues, but at the moment I think that's one of the biggest problems, there isn't this kind of space where we can find each other you know as this guy Pete (Compton?) said we were at CSM today and there were loads of things going on there that we should be able to find out about, but we just don't know, you know. I think it is one of the easiest and quickest things that the COP could achieve, would be simply mapping out who everybody is and what they are doing and allowing people to begin to share practice, which we're not currently very well equipped to do.

[We then begin to talk about specifics of the fellowship before moving back to Paul's proposal to set up a COP around technology-enhanced learning...]

PL: Well as I said before it is mentioned so often (the term community of practice) it's literally written into a lot of our strategic documents that this will be developed, but as it stands there's...

PM: ...no model for it

PL: ...no model for it or development model for it and I feel that I have spent quite a lot of time working on building that developmental model and I feel that its being wasted in a way...

PM: It needs to be tested I think, particularly with funding becoming scarcer we have to find a way of working smarter I think.

PL: Well yes, but it's not just going to happen by itself, because it hasn't up until now happened by itself really you know.

PM: Yes, Wenger is right in that way, it does need supporting...

PL: Yes it needs a bit of seed funding and a bit of sponsorship.

PM: and with the Clip Cets going, which was a fantastic source of development, something needs to be in place.

It's interesting for me that we are at the beginning of the 21st Century, a hundred years after the sort of the industrial revolution and early advances in cinema and through my practice based research it became clear that nobody knew what form cinema would eventually take in 1908...

PL: ...But actually what I think is really interesting is that a lot of early cinema is very different to cinema today, with cinema having a three act linear narrative, like going to a fancy play, but I think early cinema was much more experimental, it didn't have a formal structure, like what we have today so..

PM: Well, that's my point, I feel we are in a similar place now (with digital technology)

PL: Well exactly, and that's why I feel it's important to be quite agile. For example, there is a five year validation process and the things that I am using to teach my course today didn't even exist five years ago, you know, Youtube, web conferencing, Twitter, they didn't exist, you know and I cant imagine teaching without them now, but five years ago when we wrote the document they didn't exist, so who knows what will be in place in five years time.

PM: Again, Its something we are trying to instill in the students (this flexibility, digital agility and critical approach) and I think that it's important that the structures we work with try and adopt a similar approach (structural alignment)

PL: I think one thing we've really got try to be doing is this horizon or future scanning, looking out there for examples of good practice outside the Institution and bringing that in, again it's that idea of collective intelligence, you know, sharing resources, that a community of practice is fantastic at doing, that's one thing we are missing, I mean I am doing a lot of, you're doing a lot of it, Lyndsay (Jordan) is doing a lot of it, but none of us are able to communicate that to each other and share because we don't really have a space to do it in.

PM: Brilliant, thanks Paul!

PL: OK! Great!

Interview with Jo Morrison [15.06.10]
Digital Projects Director
Central St Martins College of Art and Design

PM: Could you tell me about your role as a context for the project that you've carried out?

JM: OK, my title is Digital Projects Director at CSM. I don't teach on any particular course, I am an academic member of staff, and I work across a number of different courses. One thing that I have been seconded to do is work with the University (with a Dean of College) around the 2012 Olympics, which is outside of my role at CSM and that will be for two years.

Within the College, one of the areas I've been asked to look at, particularly looking forward to the move to King's Cross is 'How can we support staff and students to encourage appropriate uses of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) within the courses for teaching and learning?' Appropriate being the important word here, I know that HEFCE have written an update to their e-learning strategy, where they talk about the e in e-learning not being about electronic, but enhanced learning, which I think could be really useful. Dianna Laurillard too talks about for ICT to really be of use, it has to be able to transform curriculum design you need to be addressing local issues, and so it should be the practitioner that is driving forward the use of technologies as opposed to some kind of technological imposition, she has been talking mainly about schools but I think it is the same with any educational organization.

I have been working quite closely with CLTAD in order to see what are the best models for CSM, and for CLTAD and CSM to work closer, better, more efficiently etc. One of the other areas I look at is cross-disciplinary working, looking at collaboration, both within CSM but also with externals with more STEM based Universities, so we've done some work with UCL (University College London) and a very small piece between the Textiles course and a Professor at St Mary's to start trying to get some models, to see what works and doesn't work and so forth. So that's the kind of area I work in. I am very much interested in Communities of Practice. My background is that I was a founding Creative Director of a creative Research and Development lab called Futurelab, which is based in Bristol and was born out of NESTA, (National Endowment for Science and Technology in the Arts) which was looking at innovative approaches to technologies to enhance learning. Yes, so that's my background and that's who I am!

PM: I am so glad I got in contact with you! If you hadn't have responded to my survey I would have missed an opportunity there!

JM: Well, if I hadn't have responded I would have missed an opportunity too!

PM: That's brilliant Jo, thanks! Now, I know you have sent me some info about it, but I think it would be useful to understand how your action research project came about.

JM: Well, rather than an intervention into an existing piece of work or activity, what I chose to do was to create a new and discrete activity. I wouldn't advise people to go

down that route because it meant I was working when I was on holiday, using the - and this is where we go back to the technology- Ning online platform, I was able to do that, but it meant lots of evenings, lots of meeting up for our face to face sessions, between 6.30 and 8.30 in the evening, because that's when they could meet up because this was in addition to their courses. So yes, it meant an awful lot of work putting it all on, plus the event as well, 'cause there was all that work as well – there were three separate evenings at the V&A. It was a new activity. The project came about through feedback actually, some informal feedback that I'd had from students who said they really value working with people from other areas and not just the regular focus that they work with. That came through as well in discussions with staff on other courses. Oh, and after graduation, when the students leave, a questionnaire will go out asking them about their most valuable activities, I'm not sure that's the exact phrasing, you know, what do they appreciate most when they were at the University, and very high is their PPD, which they probably don't recognize when they are here, but when they have left. I got that information from the Student's Union Communications Director, and then I spoke to others as well and they verified that this was the case.

I thought 'What can I do then to enhance opportunities for cross-disciplinary practice?' (Or cross-specialism because everybody was from the crafts base, within the School of Fashion and Textiles at CSM) I thought it's a big ask, but let's do something that hopefully supports their academic practice, in terms of learning about other people's research methods and processes, learning about other peoples approaches to materials, the design process within different contexts and so on, in which to broaden their own horizons. At the same time, I wanted to give them the opportunity, as they were all final year students, to create their own exhibition. So that's what I came up with, and a presentation as well, where what they've been doing in terms of their process is at the fore in their presentations, such that they are actually articulating their process and their research methods and so on and so forth. I also thought that, doing something at the V&A, would be the motivation for them to keep going with the project because what's really important, and I was aware of this, is that the project was happening at a critical point of their learning, the final two terms coming up to the degree shows.

I spoke to each of the Course Directors and I said " This is what I'm thinking, is this absolutely insane or not?" and they said "No! We think it's great!" and so through them, the students came to me. I had selected three themes from which they would be grouped, which was related to their own independent project explorations so they had something in common in terms of their work. The themes were all agreed with the Course Directors as well (I think one of them was changed, but it was " does this work for your students as well?" I think the way that the student's came was that some were nominated, you know, "it's you, you, you" by the Course Directors and others put themselves forward and the Course Directors said, " well your work fits more into Memory Exploration" or " Yours is much more materials led" and there was some form of digital exploration as well. So is that sufficient in terms of background?

PM: Absolutely yes. I guess the pertinent question for me then, concerning the project, is why and how did you use technology to facilitate the project?

JM: Well, there are a few things. It's practical. I was the facilitator, not tutor, I didn't come from and don't come from any of their areas, my background is in Communication Design in its broadest sense, but I am not a crafts person. Also, they

have got their own programs that they are working within and so this was an additional activity for them to be very much self-directed, self-managed and self-organised. So I was taking on the facilitator role, which at times could be quite frustrating because you want to get in there when you see the ideas you know, if you are an ideas person “Oh what about this and that!” and talking about it and exploring, but that wasn’t my role and what I really didn’t want to do was in any way confuse them and think, “Oh, Jo said ...” quite separately and randomly “...why don’t I go down this route”.

Anyway, yes, why the technology? I met with them probably about six times face-to-face in the evenings and the technology was there, one because - and I chose the Ning site because it had a lot of tools, there were blogs, discussion forums, profile pages, email, audio, video and so on and so forth - and of course we’re very visual people and I wanted a tool that would enable that, it was a very visual tool and also a tool that enabled them to communicate as they wished really. So it had the flexibility. Bearing in mind that they had only met here as a group. It was a blended learning model; very definitely, it was a practical solution for them as well. They had their themed groups and these were set up within the Ning site. Because they are at University this is the time when they should be taking on anything, exploring and it can fail, it doesn’t matter, that’s what you are here to do, to learn. So I felt that it would be a place where many of them who actually hadn’t used these tools before, and yet they really are keen, going outside, you explore different technologies, because you are expected to be quite articulate and literate in the use of technologies I would say in most industries. It would give them the opportunity to see within their own practice, if they haven’t been using them, what might support them in their learning in the future. It was also again practical, because again, I asked each of them to upload a profile, a little bit about who they were, because, bearing in mind, most of these girls didn’t know each other (they were all women) and at quite a critical time in their studies they are being brought together to form a group, so I think it was more a community of enquiry rather than a community of practice. Then they are expected to do something, which is a big ask of them, so how can we support them as best we can? Yes, so I think that was pretty much why.

PM: This may be going of tangent a little bit, you’ve said why you used it – where there any issues with it?

JM: Yeah. OK, I think the key thing that people forget when they are talking about technologies, and I’m not an evangelist, is that people are people, and when you talk about groups of enquiry and collaboration, then it comes down to people, technology isn’t going to lead it, and so I said to them from the beginning, “There is no expectation for you to manage yourselves through these groups in the Ning site (it became known as ‘Ning’, so it wasn’t ‘the online learning tool’) but give it a go and see.”

We had three groups and one group was quite fractured, they just didn’t get it together. People wouldn’t turn up for meetings, which frustrated others, and then maybe one of those that didn’t turn up felt hectored because for whatever reason, and remember some of them are married etc. Some people have different priorities; others aren’t dealing so well with stress, others aren’t as motivated and so on. So, people are people. We had one group who didn’t use it tremendously for their management and organization, because three people dropped out from their group... and once they had got to their optimal level they were small and they found it was

just easier to phone up and meet face-to-face, so that was great, that worked for them.

In terms of the other two groups, they seemed to use it pretty extensively actually and some of the feedback and I can give you some quotes actually, because I think that's the best way because there is a lot that's come out. So yes, two groups used it extensively and used it on top of their face-to-face meetings, because they valued those and said, "Well from there what did we talk about?" These are the questions that came up, and they carried on the conversations online. So you've got these amazingly rich discussions in the discussion forum, some fantastic work that for them they are just continuing, and of course for me I am coming at them fresh and I am just like "Wow, that's great!" Yeah so two groups used it really fruitfully.

Some people, I think it was BA Jewellery chose not to use a blog at all so I was like "Just try and use it everyone please, for yourselves." Again for the exploration while you are here, but in fact they didn't have the time to do it and they didn't need to as they are asked to keep what they called a hand-written commentary within their course so obviously there is then no need for them to repeat anything. One girl did use it quite extensively and it was really interesting to see, because she used it about every three days to reflect on process and just about how she was feeling, and then someone else from her course got in touch with her and said, "Oh I am so surprised you feel wobbly because I feel wobbly too, but your work's great and I would never imagine that you feel wobbly!" And so that was quite interesting and it's that peer learning and support and it's not just about the project and the process, it's again about that human side as well...

PM: Shared experience?

JM: Yeah, and other people...because I've just got the questionnaires back and I was going over them this weekend, shall I tell you what they said, would that be helpful?

PM: Definitely!

JM: OK well, the four main motivations for the student's to participate (because I asked them why they had chosen to participate), one was showing work at the V&A, another was participation in a cross-specialism activity and the opportunity to learn from each other. The third was 'broaden individual thinking' and the fourth was 'enhance presentation skills.' So that was their initial motivation. One of the quotes here is:

"Meeting on a regular basis with people who were not on my course and not from my artistic discipline has been great for me to articulate my research in a coherent way to those outside my work."

And that, communication, has come out a lot and confidence is another outcome, a lot of people said 'I feel more confident, not only through talking about my work, because I can't use jargon and it's made me have to think about my work and people ask me questions, so I feel I know my work more'. And so it's the communication side of confidence, but them feeling, because they've had positive responses to their work and interest, then they've gone and exhibited at the V&A, and so forth, they felt more confident as practitioners themselves. Oh, here we go:

“The project has given me confidence in my research and thinking, because I met other people who struggled with similar questions as me and we learnt together how these can be addressed.”

“The Showcase at the V&A was great for me to gather interest in my project and learn through others how to publicise the event, the working and myself.”

And I think that’s important for me as well, I know it’s not the technology, or maybe it is in part the technology, because what they then went on to do, and it wasn’t through me, it’s just them, they created their own blogs to publicise the event, they had to do a digital invite, that as a requirement of them, then some of them had like a Facebook group about it and used email extensively, because there was no budget, so they all used digital technologies to a lesser or greater extent in order to promote the event as well.

PM: What’s interesting there is you put out the possibility of using Ning for the organization, the planning and the learning and then during or after the project the students have seen the value of that, they have taken it forward in their own way.

JM: I think so. They enjoyed the face-to-face the most, but then we wouldn’t go “Oh great, it’s an online environment!” But what they enjoyed as well was looking at the profile pages of other people’s work first, so that gives you that way in, to know your territory and your group, and then starting to meet up and see individual’s work, it makes much more sense when you then go back on to communicate with these people having seen the work and felt it, to get an understanding of who they are, to then start, just as everyone else does, with using the site more, for some of the groups - but not all of them.

Do you want to know what didn’t work?

PM: Yes, You’ve already mentioned that you had this one group of the three that didn’t use the site so much...

JM: Overall what didn’t work was the BA/MA collaboration. The people who participated and showed their work at the end, they did brilliantly, so it’s not to say that the MA’s were stronger or anything, but overall, the people who dropped out, were all BA. So I think we had 15 BA Students to begin with and in the end, seven presented, and some of the strongest were BA as well, so it’s nothing to do with those individuals.

PM: Do you think that might have been to do with when it took place, because it may have been closer to the deadline for the BA’s?

JM: No, I think it’s all general isn’t it, but I think it’s down to experience, because unless it’s their second BA they probably haven’t gone through this process before with the Degree Shows and everything, whereas the MA’s have. I thought “ Right, you are all under the same amount of pressure, because you are all final year students, you have all got your Degrees coming up, you’ve all got your hand-ins and so on and so forth.” And culturally you are all from Central St Martins, they are all in the same school and they are all on the same site as well, so they’ve got a lot in

common already plus they're under the same amount of pressure, but the BA's didn't cope as well. So, of the 8 that didn't participate, 2 were no-shows right from the very beginning, they never registered. I had 2 that dropped out quite late in the day, both who got in touch with me, both of whom I know were under an awful lot of pressure, and I found that out as well, in their life and everything, and so made the right choice, to say "I'll have to leave this" which I was ever-so upset about. The others kind of fell by the wayside, but they never really participated – I think that one may have come to one of the evening sessions, there was a kind of half-hearted attempt and you can see, looking back, it's like "OK, I am not surprised" because there was a half-hearted attempt to do something online, but they didn't commit basically. So I wouldn't recommend it next time, it was too much pressure, and, as I say, it's probably that level of experience or maturity overall. So I would do this all again, but next time with MA's only at this stage of their work.

PM: OK, it sounds like the project has been fantastic overall...

JM: overall I'd say, yes.

PM: but, sorry to go back to the role of the technology, but, is there any evidence that the technology helped, beyond the initial profile stage, in terms of the cross-disciplinary or cross-specialism, or the group or the community development?

JM: I think it did, but they wouldn't be aware of that, again it's the fact that on a personal level they got to know one another, and one group in particular seemed to gel and really liked each other and you could see this change and the way people were talking "Hi-ya girlies, kiss, kiss, how are you?" you know as they were organising themselves, as they were doing what they were doing and "LOL" and all these things, but they were much more informal as they were talking to each other. One MA student said that what she really appreciated about the site was that she could be away working (because she worked professionally as well) and then come back and see what the conversations were. She would have time then to catch up and think of her response and put that down, where as when they were doing an online chat, a couple of them said it was like MSN on speed, when they were trying altogether to be chatting, one person would be responding and something else would come up, it was all quite staccato. Just looking as well at what they say, looking at the site, once they became more familiar with each other there was one group in particular, just used it as very informal communication around the project. It wasn't, as far as I am aware used for anything else other than the project; it was a locus, a place, a meeting point to share.

PM: I am not that familiar with NING, but does it have blogs incorporated into it? Was there any evidence that students were using it for reflective practice?

JM: I think only two. One person said " Oh I do upload this and that, not that anyone comments!" so she was obviously hoping that people would feed in and would be a little more responsive, where as, from other comments elsewhere you could see that people appreciated the fact that they could see how people's projects were developing, but not necessarily commenting, and so I think that some people who were making an effort would really have liked to have seen more of a response.

PM: Yes, I think there is an expectation with social media of much more of a dialogue, rather than the idea of working alone within a group.

JM: Yes, maybe, but It's like that in Face-to-face crits isn't it where some people will respond to, for whatever reason, they might have more confidence, better English language skills and so on, and within a F2F crit will say more and offer support and feed into other people's work and they get, quite understandably frustrated when it's not coming back.

PM: My experience from the CLIP-CETL project I undertook, was that students wouldn't comment on the blogs, but they would read it and comment in the F2F sessions, they would wait until the F2F session or afterwards. So the dialogue was happening but not necessarily through the site

JM: Oh, that's interesting... as I say, the one where I did notice it was where one of the MA students said "I'm feeling, I know it's all a learning experience, but I'm feeling really nervous" and another was like " Oh, I can't believe it"

PM: Yes, I think that's really nice...

JM: and then, I think, somewhere else, I don't think it was the blog, but somewhere else on the site, somebody had got in contact about video;

"Oh I see you have done a video, with a dancer in, could you tell me how to go about doing it?"

"Oh yes, this is how you go about doing it..."

So that went on, but again they met up F2F as you were saying as well and I think they'd share a lot around materials and practical things, where to buy stuff.

PM: It sounds like the student's were using it in a quite informal way, in the way they were talking to each other as you say, but also there's a great amount of honesty and trust needed for people to express their feelings online I think.

JM: Well, it was a closed environment, just for the group, its not available on the web.

PM: I guess because it was extra to the curriculum and you mentioned that they got formative assessment, did the technology help that to happen?

JM: In terms of assessment, I'd said at the outset, this is totally separate to your course and what I hope you will learn here from meeting one-another and interrogating your work through different lenses and different perspectives and through having to articulate your design practice, the research and so forth in different ways, that hopefully that would feed into your final outcome for your course. But there's no formal assessment here. However, what I did do after about three weeks, 'cause I used it very much as action research, I left it quite open and fluid and I realized I thought they needed more guidelines, a bit more structure, so I quickly wrote out some intended learning outcomes, I thought, "Well that's their language" and I thought I could use this as well as a piece of research data to see what they

were gaining out of this later myself. I wrote the intended learning outcomes and after about six weeks asked the students to send them back to me and we had a F2F session. I said to them that these were for your self and peer assessment, this is for you as part of your learning cycle, there's no summative assessment within the project. At the end they sent in the intended learning outcomes again, plus a questionnaire as well, some of it about the Ning Site, some about the overall experience. So no there wasn't any formative or summative assessment other than their own self and peer assessment.

PM: And indeed they are also measuring themselves 'in the world'

JM: Oh absolutely, well yeah and of course their feedback from their exhibitions, they were glowing, each of the three groups, once I saw them at the exhibition after having one their presentation, they were really glowing and quite rightly because they had worked incredibly hard and its nice to see, when people have put so much in, that they get what they deserve. They had some fantastic feedback, people from industry have got in touch with them, and feedback they got from their Course directors and Friends has been really positive, so I think that it was great for them.

PM: Fantastic! What have you got out of it? Do you think that it changed your role in any way, or your thoughts on the use of technology, or for teaching in general?

JM: Er, well I'd never been a facilitator, or even like an e-moderator, I had used the site, but as a student, cause I did an MA module and I used ELGG and so it was really interesting being on the student side as opposed to being on the teaching side. What did I learn? I haven't done my profile yet, I have just started this weekend to write this up and it has been quite useful in terms of thinking about myself, and one of my conclusions is going to be, that while this is very student-centred, I think it is really important to look at how satisfying it is for an academic member of staff.

I used Gilly Salmon's work on e-moderation and the five steps³¹, what you can expect as an e-moderator, and she saw five different stages of development for the learner. I can't remember what they all are, but first it's the familiarity with the tools and making sure that you welcome everyone straight away, so I did that kind of thing, you know "Hi, great to see you" to get people to use and become familiar with the technology. I really did use up to about stage three, at which point I thought " Well they really have become their own groups now" and this isn't an online learning process, so stages four and five weren't as appropriate because these people now know each other and they are learning with each other, and they are getting out of the site what they need from it.

For me, I enjoyed that, I really enjoyed the fact that it was my project and that was the creative input for me, so I had a sense of ownership, and we were all really, co-researchers, and that is what I said to them as well, "We are co-researchers, we are in this together, I don't know how this is going to transpire" and then when they were presenting, each of them said "This is a research project" so they took it on board that this was a research project that they were equal partners in.

³¹ Dr Gilly Salmon's table showing the five steps of learner development can be found at <http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/gilly/london99.html> (last accessed 21.07.10)

I can see where the technology can support. I can see where individuals need to have more support as well, we have all got different experiences, some of us are just more adept than others. I thought some people would just mooch around you know – like I do – take half an hour to mooch around and find what's where and then you find out what you can and can't do, but some others don't do that, they don't enquire in that way, which I was quite surprised about.

I think what you have to be aware about, when you are used to being an ideas person and an author as well and you're in the role of facilitator and that's its intention, you have to remember it's not about you. So as I was saying to you, when I could see these wonderful ideas and I wanted to help or have a conversation, which I don't have the time to do anyway, but I would have loved that, but actually that's not part of it, you've got to step back, and I think that with the way that we work in Art and Design, you are very much in with the students and their ideas and so it is a different head space to be in. However that said, what is wonderful at the end for me, was seeing the students rise to the occasion and glow, having learnt so much, I think, "Yes, I've helped you to do that" and that's your creative moment then, knowing that you have helped them along their way. But I wouldn't want to do it full-time, I wouldn't want it to be the only way that I engage with students, but I can see they loved the autonomy and that was kind of surprising in a way, I wasn't looking for that, but that really came out, ownership, autonomy, enjoying working together, so taking a crit format that they're used to, but not wanting to please the tutor.

PM: Were they organizing that element for themselves?

JM: Oh yes, totally. I will show you the site and you can see some of the conversations as well, and that's because they're final year students, so it's not instead of, it's just there at the right point, they have got the maturity, hell, they're graduating in a few weeks you know so they have the maturity to take something like that on.

PM: This is going back a bit, but I was fascinated by the research method that you had used, 'iterative emergent design approaches by Terrie Lynn Thompson and Colla J. McDonald'?

JM: Well that's very much like the notion of iterative design, the actual research isn't it?. It's used a lot more in software and interaction design; it's the notion of doing things, reflecting on it, going back and so on.

PM: Sorry to put you on the spot with that Jo, but that's actually really interesting. It's something that's coming out again and again from the people I've been talking to, is that it's not the technology itself that's often behind the choices that are being made or the way that they are working, but often the way that technology works, like iteration in software design... I spoke to Neil Cummings the other day and he was talking about open source software and how the structures that underpin the formation of that offered him possibilities to discuss with his students different models for artistic practice which could be collaborative or group led rather than focusing on the individual.

JM: I hadn't thought about it that way... I think that's where you have to be aware of the technology, with the Ning site, that gave me lots of tools and gave the students lots of tools that worked or didn't work for them, and I think its having that flexibility

which is important which is akin to Neil's ideas about open source, you can bolt something on because in theory (laughs) cause you have access to the code and that's the whole philosophy behind it, is shaping and re-shaping as opposed to having an imposition, and there are operating systems that are an imposition, where as with LINUX, because that's open source, that is by definition, shaped by the community, the community of practitioners and therefore that hopefully means that the more individual or group needs are driving it.

PM: Absolutely, but the idea also that the final artifact can be made by a group and can be a collaborative process rather than the idea of the single author ...

JM: Yes, and as with Linux as long as it's got a creative common's license attached to it to say this is where it came from, and then it goes wherever it goes, this is the author, you don't get anything for it but the recognition really...

PM: Yes, I'm sorry, that wasn't a question really. As an aside I wanted to ask how your role as part of the ELSG might have formed your views about technology based learning?

JM: Not at all actually, for the last six years I was I Futurelab and so that's why I joined the e-learning strategy group as opposed to the other way round where I am learning something, I mean I probably am learning I am sure, but no it hasn't changed my opinion.

PM: What do you think the issues are for the University moving forward in respect of technology-enhanced learning?

The University has to produce a consistently reliable infrastructure in order to enable staff and students to practice and to experiment. Also I think it is for the University to support students and staff in terms of, as we were saying earlier, in terms of communicating case studies and communicating good practice and even the turkeys as well, the stuff that just hasn't worked, because everyone is just so busy all the time, so that people can learn from one another, and people who are innovators should be applauded in some way, it should be recognized. So I definitely don't think it's a top-down approach it just never works, but what should be top-down is encouragement, not just through words but also through deed, so through ensuring that the infrastructure absolutely supports, and I'm looking at it from, creative practice as opposed to management systems, so obviously you want to ensure that the management systems are protected and so forth, but you also have to absolutely ensure that you are providing your community with technologies that they would naturally be able to get at home (and better!) and that are stable and robust and that afford and encourage experimentation, which is what we are here to do.

PM: Brilliant Jo, thanks. That's a great place to finish it actually!

JM: OK that's fine!

Interview with Geoff Thomas-Shaw [08.06.10]
Course Director, BA Graphic Design Communication
Chelsea College of Art and Design

PM: Students on level three are using blogs to document the development of their final Major Projects, could you talk about how they go about this?

GTS: The blogs really begin at the beginning of February. That's the start of unit 3B, which is a 60 credit module. It is used as a device where students can log their concept and improve it through negotiation in line with the assessment criteria for the Unit3B that they have to evidence. Often at this stage students panic at the start or pursue a theme that they are not particularly interested in as a means of just getting by. By its very nature of this final project has to be substantial, it has to be worthy of a double 60 credit module and is in itself a discreet part of the final portfolio and might be quite broad based. If its not a live project it has to add to an understanding of broad-based Graphic Design knowledge so again it has to be negotiated.

The first conversation about the project through the blog will be about a core concept and how it embodies the assessment criteria and then once it's approved it goes into a blog and builds up an evidence based file that all the students can see.

PM: So the blogs are shared once the projects are approved, so the students can then talk to each other about how its going to develop?

GTS: The blogs are democratic and yes they can talk to each other but that's not been the norm this year. Students are becoming increasingly guarded about protecting the originality of their themes and anticipated outcomes. Graphic Design Students tend to make very beautifully designed blogs, they represent their aesthetic, and for them it is essential that they demonstrate distinctive flair and they tend to be quite editorial and with that there is a shift in the language. The language in the blog tends to pick up from the language they use in their dissertation, quite seamless, quite interesting.

Students have said that they really enjoyed this project because the blog controls what they are doing and it has made their thoughts count. The industry is saying, "Did you realize that the way that the student's are thinking on the blog is very current with how we want students to work?" [The Stage 3 theory coordinator] and I undertook research a while ago about "What is it that we do that the industry wants?" and consequently outcomes demonstrated that the profession are very keen on this course since it understand professional practice and philosophy. One criticism of all undergraduate courses is speed and time and this has redressed the balance in that. So the blog has the additional value of becoming a conduit into the industry.

So the process is that students are entitled to publish a blog within a given deadline of four weeks once the project starts to gain approval. Once the project is approved, it is published and students have got the license on that project, because we aim to get 45 projects each year which are very different and diverse and they have also got to be directional, something new In terms of what we have already seen. But also in those early days the blog is not assessed, so we can be generous and say, well actually by default or design you are working in an area that's never been seen or

been done so you think about that. But generously the students vote for that up front so it's quite friendly.

Then there comes a point about four or five weeks down the line when the core concepts are locked in. The blogs are also used as the forum then for a number of staged crits, which formalise their thinking, and it makes the blogging process very business-like.

PM: So they are used for presentation?

GTS: Crucially these 'creative blogs' have a great importance as stand alone artifacts. We had Andreas Neophytou in college recently, one of our ex-students now at Six Create, who said, "what we like about these blogs is, not so much the artifact but if a student came to an interview with a blog like that, then we would be interested in taking them on". They're fantastic because they show real understanding. The key feature of the blog that it clearly defines, through a concise text header, what the project and core concept is and the students stay with that, although they can morph and evolve.

Although similar in ambition, it is not a post-graduate project in terms of the time spent on it, students have roughly have fourteen weeks on it with the Easter break in the middle so it gives them extra time to focus. The blog also supports visual files with students finding imagery and objects that they're responding to. Another feature of the blog is that we ask students to identify those and to comment on them, and that avoids plagiarism, so that's a fantastic thing. They're very public in terms of our culture but we don't publish these blogs before the degree show because there are very important ideas in there. This process also demonstrates to students that we are respectful of them coming up with ideas, that they will be influenced by other visual ephemera, but we are receptive to plagiarism and we are conscious that it might happen and support students in avoiding it.

PM: So in terms of their research, they are putting things up there that are out in the world of design, but rather than just putting them up there, they are having to reflect on them?

GTS: In many instances, if students wish to work with a client, they will say to the client "I am doing an important project" and they send the url address of the blog, then the client gets a clear understanding of what they are doing and in terms of responses they get a hundred per cent success rate with clients saying "I am willing to talk to you about this project, to discuss it with you". One of the better features of the blog has been the fact that it's really changed peoples practice in ways we could never have predicted; it's been a very open field.

There's evidence that if students consolidate the project early on, they have got a greater chance of getting it through, but some people have really thought about the core assessment and what they want to achieve and because they've got quite sophisticated graphics skills, they have held back a little bit on the content. There is lots of evidence of discussions with clients, so people record movies and interviews, which identify issues raised from meetings with clients, it shows them in the work place if they have been out to get stuff made in situ or on placement.

As a Course Director working on the project with them you can see, 24/7, at a glance at what point in the process students are and what they are doing. We've found that on average at least 80% of students update it at least once daily, which is really

good, they are very rigorous. Updates can be spotted very quickly and it's good to see the work develop. In terms of working with students one-to one, they are very good at saying "I am working on an identity, a letterform, a colour, I've tried these several options", it's encouraging students to try lots of options out and ask for an opinion, rather than leave it to an open forum and say "What do you think I should do?" It's looking for feedback through an evidence base.

PM: It makes their learning explicit doesn't it?

GTS: It makes it explicit and very precise and transparent and then there are points at which you can spot the accumulation of success. The key thing for me is that within this type of a blog you can spot a project has got more to offer, it is organic and it moves forward and we have found that many of the students have raised the ambition of the outcomes because the development of the blog gives them confidence. They also get very meticulous about how they record what they do because everything on this is ultimately assessable. In practice how it works is that I am not marking the work blind, I am familiar with it all these blogs in incredible detail, so it makes the assessment fairer. It's fantastic in spotting a student who is deficient somehow or who needs help in particular areas, you can spot them earlier on. It's also great for students that are intimidated by crits, or work in different kinds of ways, because it allows for feedback on a one-to-one basis. You still keep contact with it, but you can make quite informed observations, you can look through the whole blog and say, "Guys there's a general feeling in the group that you are being under-ambitious or over-ambitious at this point" or "there's areas of typography that need looking at". So you get a broader brush-stroke approach when working with the blogs.

The students have still attended, they are still part of a community, so it's not strictly distance learning as such.

PM: More of a blended learning approach?

GTS: In terms of the formal assessment of the final project, the blog is a stand-alone artifact in its own right and supports the production of two and three-dimensional outcomes. It is a portfolio of practice. In terms of where we are now, (at the time of interview) the internal marking has happened this week with [a tutor from another course], who has been reviewing the blogs in the last two weeks and has come up with a series of questions to clarify, so that makes the marking process much more focused, because you really get to know the project in depth. With over 40 students to review in two days, the opportunity for markers to look at work in detail in advance is a great benefit and is again is much fairer to students. The external examiner is party to it as well; he is looking at them and gets a really strong view and heightens the anticipation of work he is about to experience. Crucially the external examiner cannot communicate with the students or offer advice since this would contravene examination protocol. There are some students who are stronger at the methodology than the making and so its quite useful in that sense and the assessment can recognise this skill, so its fairer all round really. Also at this time where we are talking to the press and we can submit the blogs as a review of story of the projects.

Other core staff across levels are able to dip into the blogs and comment on students work, advise on references and contacts and support in their specialist areas of practice. In terms of the Degree show, this year we have an extended wall in the

show, which we are recording the blogs on. We are featuring enlarged digital prints to demonstrate a series of conceptual trails because they are wonderful evidence of a concept coming all the way through to completion. Future collaborators and employers want to see process: this is key.

The blogs also feature an outcome, which has traditionally been a really good part of Design Education, but often omitted, that it is good to make mistakes and this makes students feel really comfortable because they can experiment and encounter mistake early in the process and frequently comment: "I think I've gone off in this direction". Rather than wait for the crit in two weeks time it can be spotted much sooner. Engagement with the blogs has also made student's conversation with me much more intelligent because communication is less abstract. The blog is frequently plasma screen projected and is consequently convenient to view. Students making moving image work will produce a sample video, people doing packaging will make sample dummy packaging, people doing a typeface will do a sample, and so they are really testing it out. This is very similar to the way designers are working in professional practice, so it's great for preparing for and bridging the gap into industry.

It was a revelation but on reflection seems like a natural comment for the industry to say "When we interview the student's, please let them bring their blogs, it's really important". This breaks with the tradition of the finished artifact being the only evidence of skill and traces back through the conceptual process. Within assessment, there is evidence that plagiarism has been avoided and commends the process which best fits the assessment criteria.

PM: Both conceptual and practical processes...

GTS: Yes, and it also gives students a real understanding of time management. Where a student's project is not as strong as it might be, or the outcome is not as strong as it might be, the blog evidences that, other than work being a personal opinion or something that's based on a comparison with the established norm. You get a much clearer understanding of each student's ability rather than comparing like with like, that's the main thing.

PM: Do you find it helps with this idea of community, that you can look at the blogs and find out what each other are doing?

GTS: I have been asking students as we have been going through this process, what they have thought of the blog and they have been saying that they thought it was fantastic. Some have been obsessively looking at others work; it has really helped students to look at each other's work. Traditionally it was easy to isolate yourself from it, it's actually kept the community together, it's enhanced it, and it's encouraged a form of competitive spirit which has not been forced and that's a good thing. In terms of my input into these projects this year and in terms of my interaction, or others interaction with them, it's been about using peer examples and making people feel like they are comparative and the evidence is on the table and some students have really risen to the challenge. The key thing as well which we have included into the assessment criteria is, and particular to live projects is that students have to field test concepts and outcomes and get feedback, which has been fantastic. But I also think that if you look at the blogs, such as they are, they work visually and they also have a depth of narrativity.

PM: How does that pervasiveness of the blogs, having them available all the time, helping you in your role, it's clearly helping the students. But how does it help you?

GTS: Well I think there are two things really. Blogging offers a clear indication of the journey through a project and it gives you real evidence so you can say "look I have spotted something on your blog which is a real issue, I want you to look at it and get back to me and it's less abstracted, less formalized and the students respond to that kind of treatment. It works best really, and I know this sounds trite, but when you're open 24/7 to comment, and when students are pushing really hard to make high quality work then I don't mind taking five minutes here and ten minutes there of my own schedule to review progress. As an educator, it gives me an understanding of their major project and its alignment to the assessment criteria. The process offers students much more autonomy and I feel the marking is much fairer and more concise.

PM: In a way, assessment is happening then, as an ongoing process?

GTS: There is very clear evidence that this year the achievement has been enhanced as a result of using these blogs and that's why next year when we run the new validated course system, we are giving the blogs a credit value of their own. This innovation will also recognise the contact that second markers have when tracing the work throughout and particularly in the latter stages.

PM: In a way there is no issue with that because the writing of a blog or the ability to use this kind of technology is something that you would expect a graphic design student to be able to do anyway?

GTS: It is, and I think also that you'll find that a contemporary, up-and-coming, cool or even established graphic design companies run blogs as well on their practice and do it because they are still retaining a joy for experimental practice and as graphic designers they are not always solely interested in the end-product. Or they just do a blog because it underpins some of the philosophies about the business or objects around them or reflects international activity. I think the software has helped because it is becoming increasingly sophisticated and students achieve a better-looking product, it's not stilted. I also think there is a massive resistance because of the amount of Mac users on this course to Blackboard. Blackboard does not do it for them- or match up to their requirements.

I think Blackboard is too officious although in terms of basic communication and dissemination of data, it's fine.

Each student seems to have a small number of up to six students that they are in close communication with and review and comment on each other's work and progress. But more commonly they use the blog as the basis for a conversation on Facebook. What's really good though is if a student is on a photo shoot or they are working on a placement or they are working in a testing environment, they can record it and send me movies and evidence these activities, which is really interesting. I think the biggest feature of the blogs from a students point of view is the recording the emotive responses to their own and to fellow students work. We didn't expect students to communicate so emotively and they talk very clearly about their responses to projects: "Had a good day", "Had a bad day", or "met this person, very useful" or "Cut a corner here" or so on. I think that Chelsea Students have always

had a high degree of confidence, because the Chelsea brand is a good bridge in promoting communication with professionals and the industry. There is strong evidence of broader communication with the graphic design and communications industries here. In turn this means that there can be number of external commentators other than myself contributing to the project, which is fantastic. If you are being honest, in a time of recession, that's free teaching, happening at a high level, very professional. I think the blog has locked down a new form of communication and rather than students evidencing their progress through a series of jpegs or spurious diagrams, or a piece of copy that's not really a solid idea, they are sending a blog and saying, "What do you think?" The tricky part is to ensure that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are consistently aligned and students can literally tick these off. Students feel confident throughout all stages of the process that they are meeting these criteria or, indeed, exceeding them. In terms of quality education, it's that you are working to get the students to operate at their best level.

PM: You might be able to echo this, but we found that with some of the blogs that because you are giving the students this autonomy, and because you make them aware of the learning outcomes, they can quite often go beyond expectations because they are in effect writing their own brief?

GTS: They are, mostly because we have a relatively small cohort of very bright students, that I believe year on year are getting brighter. We are able to note this promise from admission right the way through three stages of study. Our students are not merely Graphic Designers but are frequently ambitious risk takers who want to make a difference; they are dedicated and they are intelligent. By example we are experiencing a year where performance in terms of practice is inspired by the content and context of dissertations. What I would say about the blogs is the fact that while they could be viewed as a tool for recording process, they are a million miles away from the sketchbook, because I think students produce them with dignity as a stand-alone artifact. Including blogs in assessment is also crucial since they are an explicit demonstration of the design process through a sophisticated piece of work which at best echoes ethos of postgraduate study in terms of methodology and recording data. This has given students confidence to engage in further study and in particular in admission to the Royal College, because when they went for interview they took their blogs for interview which were well received.

I think that the turning point on the course is that the students do not feel that doing the blog is an ancillary part of doing the project, it is the project. Which is really interesting isn't it? It's not something that works outside the project, like a sketchbook, it's the journey and they love showing in incredible detail along with the articulation of making the work. Again, they show it in detail and they record it in detail. For example, if they are on a photo-shoot for Alexander McQueen, they will have someone there shooting them shooting it.

PM: That's really interesting...

GTS: Everything is based around proving a point, so in terms of assessing it, it's really clear to me what they are doing, why they've done it, how they've done it. I think when we first conceived the final project blog it, it was merely a mechanism by which we could control a group of students and get projects done on time. Now its

much, much more than that and that's why we've made a big splash of presenting them in the degree show.

PM: Talking about the degree show, do you still use a single blog with all the student voices to help direct the show?

GTS: [The Course Technician] is an integral part of the team and is working on the show blog, which this year has become incredibly articulate. There is obviously another feature of Graphic Design, which has become mainstream now, which is the re-emergence of information graphics. Blogging has now become less an auteur with a more a visually sophisticated and articulated mechanism. Students like order and control in their lives so it has translated into that way of thinking.

If you look at a sample of the blogs and the student projects they will set themselves target dates and deadlines realistic to the industry deadlines and some students use charts within their blogs to record schedules and achieving timescales. There are lots of examples on the blogs where students have made poor judgment or something didn't work right, but they have built in time to correct that. So it has given them an incredible deal of competence really.

PM: The show blog is a perfect example of how the show is this team activity...

GTS: It's a huge team activity we started assessing yesterday and for some reason students resorted to the tradition of displaying their work on plinths, or on tables with tablecloths and I found this difficult because students were making unsophisticated choices in feeling the need to affect a notion of display within internal assessment, which was entirely unnecessary. Students need to be constantly reminded that the group show ethos is really important and a more professional display ethic can be put on hold until the graduate show. Students are re-assured that their creative final project blogs are more effective at preliminary stage of demonstrating their methodology and work.

You would expect that if you had a broad-based course with 50% of the assessment based on a student's individual personal project that could become quite vacuous and difficult to direct and manage, but in reality it is the most focused part of the year. The students have said to me that the opportunity to write and direct their own brief using a blog is more complex and convoluted and more intellectual than being given a brief that has inflexible assessment criteria attached to it.

I am not talking about demoting the importance of assessment criteria, assessment parameters are gospel within a blog and you keep going back to those. In actuality students are very good at going back and saying I may not have met that assessment criteria. In this respect academic responses avoid becoming personal and not based on taste issues but on its factual evidence.

PM: ...and if it's not there, it's not there!

GTS: If it's not there, you say it's not there, you don't wait to the end and say it's not there. Within contemporary Graphic Design education, we are seeing through a series of validations of new courses that course teams are thinking long and hard about the notion of developing broad-based courses, which require a different type of intellectual engagement. Fears that a broad-based experience is uncontrollable are

unfounded, they do have parameters, and it is perhaps the way to go because the core subject in itself has become so expansive. In practice a broad-based course is actually more complex to deliver and require students to trust and become comfortable with the concept. Ironically the final project blogs demonstrate that students are graduating with wonderful specialism's that the industry want. So we've got art directors, fashion pr's, illustrators, typographers, branding people, who we are being told that we wouldn't get from a college with a clearly defined three-year specialism because they have thought broadly. The difference is that students contextualise their work and that's another thing about these blogs, there's huge advantage in the concept being taken back to its original contextualisation. Traditionally the student's natural propensity is "do you like my work?" We work at taking the subjective out of the process, which becomes neither subjective nor objective. In review and assessment it's not about the tutor's personal taste, you consider work within a broader field of practice. So in many ways students are designing by intuition and by design and desire but it's amazing to see that because their training derived from stage one and two informs a lot of what they are coming up with at stage 3 and this is actually quite identifiable on the blog.

PM: So in this case then through the use of blogs in the past, it has actually had an impact on the course structure, assessment...

GTS: Definitely. I have got to produce a course monitoring report shortly, but I will highlight this as being one of the key features, it's been real joy. I mean, what a fantastic resource to show incoming students next year, it's like an archive of practice, which is fantastic really. For us they are the story of the project in its entirety and it's the student's dialogue about it and contains good quality writing, which is notably improved year on year and is an excellent research resource for future students.

PM: So this implementation has met all the needs then really?

GTS: Yes it has , but one thing I have to stress is that they have been used less for community conversation, that might be because students are now inclined to formalise them. I mean at best they are like online exhibitions and they actually become quite compulsive, I have to look at them all the time. In practice it's very unusual I think for anybody in my position to be able to cite, clearly, in detail 45 projects very concisely. And actually the other thing that happens is that students are very pleased and very flattered and very comforted that I say " I looked at your blog yesterday", they feel as though you're very in tune with their project. But they do become obsessive bloggers and students have commented on the obsessive nature of them. I would say actually as we're coming towards the closing stages of the project, it can take a good five or six hours to read them, because they are very intense and therefore interesting. So as a reviewer you have to be committed, you can't glance or skim over them, because there could be a key point or issue in there that can't be glossed over.

What you can do is get back to students and say: " Could you just summarise the key points in there." there is a current habit of that happening.

Students have scripted their blogs using some great language, they are slightly colloquial, but there is nothing that we cannot present to outside parties. They're also good for a small number of students who, after two or three weeks discover the

project's going nowhere and they can start again. But we don't penalise that necessarily, they just have to make up the time.

There's a natural urgency within stage three to be competitive, to say "are you in the top stream, or are you being left behind?" but actually there's none of that because it becomes more about your personal degree of ambition. It's the same as the validation of a degree course; it's validated by the degree of ambition you want to give it. It's early days yet, but I really think that we will get feedback from our graduates saying "we really like the blogs" and actually there's lots of evidence that people are going to continue the blogs once the formal assessment of the project is completed. Students are increasingly emailing a link to their blogs to support applications for internships or an interview. Employers or future collaborators get a really clear sense of the kind of mindset, everything from the humour to the practicality, to the workmanship qualities of the person when they read the blogs. Also the blogs are quite joyous in their own right and students record within them their thrill when a dummy book arrives, or they get to meet somebody influential or they get permission to shoot something or whatever excites them. But again our students are telling us that they're learning a great deal about how the industry works and record factual experiences.

PM: So maybe where a student may be working on a live project or collaborating, it can be done through the blog?

GTS: Yes I'd say so. Logging and reviewing the project timeline is comforting for them as they are working to deadlines. Also the fact that is our students are frequently great personalities in their own right and often formally structured assessment can be de-personalised or cold can't it?

PM: The student voice is there isn't it?

GTS: The student voice is there and they are incredibly intelligent in terms of the way they criticise themselves, but because it is on the blog it is recorded and issues can be turned around very rapidly. So in the early days, making errors and going down the wrong path is good. I would also say that because of the incredible expense incurred by the exacting production standards we expect, students can plan more effectively. It has become a hand-me-down tradition now that product within graphics has to be incredibly beautifully made and with the high price students pay to make work and submit to the degree show, blogs help students avoid expensive errors. The blogs are used between themselves, between the college and me, between outside manufacturers; it's a really good record of facilitating and manufacturing outcomes.

PM: Brilliant ... thanks!

GTS: Good!

Meeting with Nancy Turner [24.06.10]
Director of Professional Development
CLTAD

PM: Can we start with your role and responsibilities?

NT: Sure. Well, my role is primarily to oversee a part of CLTAD, which looks after professional development and e-learning. So the teams that are within the part of CLTAD that I work with are the people who run the Masters provision that we have, so Post Graduate Certificate and Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning, as well as our short courses and workshop delivery. In that we also provide (although this is something we probably don't do enough of yet) support for teams under-going revalidation if they are interested in exploring e-learning from a curriculum point of view. We can go and have conversations and explore some of those ideas so that more collaborative approach rather than just a series of workshops that we choose the topics for and expect people to come to us, we are trying to shift a bit of that over time.

Anyway, that's one section, the other section is e-learning provision, and there is obviously a bit of a grey area between these two where we actually support people in using e-learning, developing e-learning and then embedding it into the curriculum. But we are also responsible for support and delivery of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). So we work with colleagues in Information Services to do this, but really it's our primary responsibility to make sure that our Virtual Learning Environment is functioning, is accessible, that problems are fixed and all those kinds of more technical issues as well. So the team actually spans quite a range in terms of their expertise.

PM: OK, The sort of grey area you talk about is interesting, it's mentioned in the various strategies, HEFCE say that they understand this position between maintaining an autonomy for practitioners as well as ensuring that the basics are covered in terms of providing a centralised resource...are there any issues with that as far as you can see?

NT: (Laughs) Yeah, I do know what you mean, that's a really big question!

PM: Sorry...!

NT: I think it's a huge issue and I think, as you suggest, HEFCE³² is looking at it, national bodies are looking at it, it's a pervasive problem and it's not just in the UK, it's a problem in higher education internationally, to try and get that balance right between trying to provide some sort of core, and especially coming out of more historic ideas of online learning and blended learning, having a kind of virtual component to it, and the need to have that as a protected and secure space against the rapid change that's happening in our digital landscape I suppose, and what impact that has on learning and teaching and e-learning at universities. I don't think that anybody has actually been able to keep up with that transition. So we are still embedded in this idea of a kind of protected, secure VLE model, and I think that the community, of students particularly, are crying out for a more open, freely accessible and as a result, more progressive, use of technology.

³² Information about HEFCE can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>. Hefce's strategies for e-learning can be found at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_12/

I think it is a real challenge for Universities to work out how to bridge that really, because I think there will likely be an ongoing need for a secure and protected area for learning and teaching to take place, but I feel we haven't done well enough to move towards what students are asking us for - and staff, but more being driven by students - in terms of the more open and collaborative, community based activity.

PM: It's an interesting situation that we are in, we're going through a bit of a revolution and maybe we just don't know the answer yet as to how this is going to go?

NT: I think you are right, the big questions keep coming and there are so many legal issues and security issues and protection of a student's comments and ideas and again I think students are coming to us with, I think they are more comfortable with a more open, virtual environment, whereas staff are less comfortable with that I suppose. That is a real challenge and I think we need to let go of some of our need to reign in... but at the same time we have to be cognisant of the risks that are associated with moving in that direction. It's not easy on so many levels, it's not easy when you think of the legal implications, it's not easy when you think ideologically and what actually has to shift in terms of our collective institutional approach to engaging in virtual learning and I think it's also a big shift in terms of the infrastructure and the networks and that kind of thing so I think it's a big issue at multiple levels actually and sometimes it can be difficult to know where you actually begin to tackle it.

PM: Yes, absolutely, but I guess at the moment you are tasked, with Blackboard coming up for review, to have to come up with an interim plan, and you've spoken before at the ELSG (E-learning Strategy Group) of the possible separation between a content management system (CMS) and a Virtual learning Environment (VLE) , perhaps we could talk about that?

NT: Yeah, or the Learning Management System (LMS) I think, there are two parts to it. The CMS is your kind of repository for where all of your information sits, the CMS is a bit hidden and it just underpins everything. The LMS is then where you get information managed by course, they tend to be quite closed off segments of the system where the students can go in and access information and collaborate, but it's very specific to their course. The VLE I see as a kind of broader suite of tools that may actually integrate with the LMS, but they might not all be course based. So there would be some things that actually allow a bit more functionality than the learning management systems that are out there currently provide, more social, more collaborative kinds of activity that some learning management systems like Blackboard haven't been so good at keeping up on.

When you have a company that's only developing a blog, inevitably it's going to be much better than if there is a blog within a larger suite of tools, because they can focus and improve the functionality more specifically. But, I think also, what we want to do is create a VLE, which will probably be in conjunction with the Portal³³, that actually starts to break down some of those silos and allows a more holistic approach to a student's learning, so it's not just about them learning within their academic course, because I think we always knew this, but I think it's becoming more recognised that learning happens outside of the course and should actually be

³³ The University portal is at <http://my.arts.ac.uk/>

encouraged outside of the course. It's how we actually provide support for that to happen, especially when we are geographically spread and students may be wanting to access collaboration and community from where they are actually living as well as coming into a more physical community within the college. So it's trying to provide something that will allow for the course based silos to be broken down a bit, while still acknowledging that there is likely to be a need to have course based content, collaboration and materials as well. So that it's not just this big mass of information that students come into and don't know how to navigate their way through. There has got to be some kind of anchor but then we want to be able to provide a more open area.

PM: That actually makes really good sense, as you say, we are crossing boundaries between security and protecting students rights and ideas and making sure they can access all the resources, but trying to create layers so they can then reach out towards the outside world and be a bit more progressive...

NT: Exactly and along with that, other than the course based silo the other issue is 'what is controlled by the Institution?' (and by this I mean the 'system') and how we actually set up the system, which has to have some form of control, otherwise... its more to assist people so they don't have to do everything to create a course for example. So there is some of that and also 'What is controlled by the tutor?' and 'what's controlled by the student?' and we need some of each, so we need spaces where the tutor says, well, this is what's important, we need to have the course regulations, we need to have the course handbook. Student's need to have a place where they can access assessment, timetables and all those kinds of things. And there might be certain types of activities the tutor wants to make sure the student engages with as part of their learning. But then they will also want spaces, and again I think this is what I don't think we have been so good at keeping up on, we need to have spaces where students can drive what they want to do, and that's obviously essential in an arts education and it is certainly part of the ethos of all the programs we offer here and we haven't been good enough at providing that, virtually. So we need more space where students can determine and drive what they want to do with the technology to enhance their learning, individually and collaboratively.

PM: Again I am aware of that coming up in the HEFCE strategy, that students are now wanting to use their own equipment and they are a happy with their on digital learning, but that the University can help with the more collaborative stuff.

NT: Yes and we have done a very small amount of that. Blackboard I would say is almost entirely teacher driven; there are very few bits of it where a student can actually do something that isn't within the confines of what the teacher has actually set up. But with Wimba³⁴, a separate tool that plugs into Blackboard, there are components of it, like Pronto, that students can actually initiate and do their own one-to one communication or they can set up group work, they can do presentations on Pronto they can document-share, so that's a student driven tool so a teacher can use it in the same way, but a student could actually choose to use the tool when and

³⁴ Information about Wimba can be found at <http://www.wimba.com/> where it is described as a 'Provider of collaborative learning software applications and services that enable schools and institutions to deliver online and distance education courses effectively.'

where they want to, which again is a shift in the role of the traditional learning management system.

PM: I wonder what the student expectations are of the design of these tools? I was talking to an interviewee about the fact that students, as they can with a lot of their social media, will want to customise it and personalise it and I wonder if this is one of the expectations that they have?

NT: I think it is, definitely, when you go outside of university systems, most of everything else that you engage with as an individual in your virtual life, you can customise and tailor and you can make it look the way you want it to and those are the tools that most people are drawn to. This that's something that is also a challenge, because obviously that has an infrastructure and a security risk and there's functionality as well.

But I do agree, I think those are things that need to be looked at as well, How can we provide a space where students feel that it's their space and that has to be customisable and personalisable and I think the other thing we haven't been good at doing, and that's for more infrastructure related reasons is also allowing personalisation in terms of what the university presents to students as well as what the students can then do to customise it, so I guess I would probably differentiate the two.

So 'customise' meaning that you are an undergraduate student at Camberwell and therefore this is what is relevant to you, and you are also studying ceramics and therefore you may also be interested in this... and actually presenting them with information that is relevant and timely etc and we haven't been able to do that as an Institution and that's problematic cause then you just present staff and students with a whole ream of information and they have to go through it to find what is relevant to them, that's problematic because it's a large, complex organization and people don't have time to do that and students may not yet have the skills to sift through huge amounts of knowledge and know what is relevant to them...

PM: This has been identified through this research, that the 'Google generation' is not as critical when it comes to sifting information, so when there is so much information out there then the University can help by offering those higher critical thinking skills that help with how to find the information that is going to help them.

NT: Exactly, and it is very much a shift, and I think again, it's a long shift and it's an ideological shift so it's a massive undertaking to think how we are going to move from where we are to where we want to be in terms of how we engage people in learning in higher education. I think that the disciplines encompassed at the University are far more ahead of the game than most others are because we have always been quite based in the idea of the student journey towards becoming something and it has not been about content whereas other disciplines I would suggest are probably focused more on gaining knowledge and less on the whole identity development, where traditionally art and design have been based in that.

PM: That's really interesting, again in the strategy there is, for example, a discussion about e-assessment and there is mention of how e-assessment can take the form of a questionnaire or something like that...

NT: It's just not relevant...

PM: It doesn't work for us, but e-portfolios for example are a much more relevant solution.

NT: And that is something we are working on doing as well and we will be piloting e-portfolios this year. CLTAD has been doing a significant piece of work by looking at what the specific needs of our student and staff contingent is in terms of e-portfolios and again, not to go back to the idea that we are unique, because I think there are lots of things that are pervasive across the sector, but I do think our needs in terms of e-portfolios are unique and an off the shelf solution just doesn't suit us, but that's the case for a number of tools, which is also quite a challenge, but an interesting one!

PM: Yes, definitely! Maybe we could talk a bit about, it's interesting that the technology has brought about a change in thinking, a questioning of the notions of authorship and ownership and it is happening at student level where on one hand they need to protect their rights and their ideas, but on another they are much more open and willing to share. But there is an opportunity now through Open Education Resources³⁵ where this can happen at a staff level, could we talk about what CLTAD are doing with this?

NT: Yes, well, I think there are two sides two that, I think there is a question of culture change to a certain extent, and part of that would be just having conversations and debating these ideas and what they actually mean for our educational practice, so that's a huge one and then secondly there is the technology that actually underpins that and so there are these two streams as there always is with learning technology and what were doing on both fronts within the next year is that we will be opening an open educational repository (OER) for teaching and learning materials. So it will be very similar to 'UAL research online'³⁶ that has been launched within the last two years and has been hugely successful to collect and allow access to research produced within the University. The teaching and learning repository will be very similar, other than it will be tweaked with an understanding about what is different about a teaching and learning resource as opposed to a research output and the needs of the community around use and re-use of learning and teaching resources.

So, there will be the standard approach where you can put your documents in there, you can put a context in there, this is how and why it was used and that kind of a thing, so a bit of a narrative with it, and then individuals can access them, you can put a varying level of access and copyright on them and then others can access them, repurpose them, add to them and then upload them back to the environment so that there can be a history and a progression of a tool used in varying contexts and varying purposes and so there's a kind of collaborative community building component to it as well. That's what the technology can do, but what has to go along with that are the discussions and debates about what does that mean for our practice

³⁵ Open educational resources (OER) are learning materials that are freely available for use, remixing and redistribution. The term "open educational resources" was first adopted at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. (From Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_educational_resources (last accessed 17.08.10))

³⁶ UAL Research Online is the online showcase of the research produced at University of the Arts London. It can be found at <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/>

in arts education and how do we engage people in discussing these ideas and how do we create the technical infrastructure that meets the needs of where people are at now and allows for some safer exploration of those ideas I suppose, but also allows for the more open release when and if people are ready to do that, obviously with the idea that we can move to more of an open release, because we think there are multiple benefits to sharing our resources, access them use them, re-purpose them and then feed them back into the community.

PM: Excellent, that sounds really good, particularly as we are at a point where we are trying to do more with less, sharing seems to be a way forward.

NT: It does, no, I agree, and again much of this is across the sector, but within the Institution there's so much replication of effort, quite understandably because people just have to get on and do their jobs, but if we can provide a space where sharing and collaboration can be facilitated then that is obviously what we want to do. So we will have an open educational resource and we're hoping that we are also going to be getting some funding from JISC³⁷ (Joint Information Systems Committee) to then help support the culture change bit that will go along with creating the technical infrastructure that will allow us to get there.

PM: Good, exciting stuff!

NT: It is , it's very exciting!

PM: I guess this is a little bit about professional development, but again in the revised HEFCE strategy it talks about how there might be an issue with how to develop innovative uses of technology more widely, above and beyond 'enthusiasts', which I guess I might fit into there!

NT: I think you are! (Laughs).

PM: You know we've talked about the massive student expectation and they are very flexible with the tools, maybe with some higher level skills needed, but maybe there's an issue with professionals having the confidence and the staff having the confidence to meet that. How can you begin to do that?

NT: I think it's exceptionally difficult, I think what often happens is you start with your enthusiasts and you hope that the enthusiasm of those individuals kind of spreads organically so there's that, but obviously an institutional strategy that seeks to develop e-learning can't only depend on key enthusiasts out in the community, but I think that's how many Institutions have kind of left things to roll for a while and I think now there's a recognition that that is not a sustainable model and it's actually not having the kind of knock on effect that was hoped.

So, it's a controversial move but, and one that could be argued for and against quite convincingly, but the idea of having a policy that all course must have a blackboard site for example, pushes people to a certain extent to engage at a base level, as long as the support can go along with that, and the opportunity to have the discussions for

³⁷ The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) support United Kingdom post-16 and higher education and research by providing leadership in the use of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) in support of learning, teaching, research and administration. JISC is funded by all of the UK post-16 and higher education funding councils. From Wikipedia (last accessed 30.07.10)

the people's views to be heard around some of the issues with that as well. But I think some of those top-down policies are helpful to kind of push the community, not that I would recommend that for everything, but it does flag up the importance that the Institutions puts on this and as long as it is coupled with the support and the opportunity to engage in discussions around those kinds of things at the more local level, then I think that they can work as a mechanism of promoting change.

I think otherwise we just have to make sure that there is an awful lot of support for individuals through varying means when they are ready to engage. I don't think you can force people to change, you can force people to dabble and engage a little bit and then you have to support them to look at it and see what some of the benefits are. I think, as we had discussed at the E-learning Strategy Group but also at the VLE presentations that we had, I think it is absolutely key that we start with the benefits. So it's not about the technology, it's about what the benefits of the technology can bring. And it really is about trying to start a conversation at that point, so it is about what benefits it can bring to staff as well as to students and so it's about the pedagogic benefits, but it's also about the efficiencies and it's about how we can try to cope in the current circumstance of having to do more with less and trying to through robust systems and tools like the learning management system, actually gain efficiencies where we can. So it's starting with those benefits. Again, I think that a lot of the people engaged in e-learning and the promotion of e-learning have been reluctant to acknowledge all of the administrative efficiency benefits that learning technology can give, and that is important then that the pedagogy benefits come alongside it. But then there are times when I think you can engage people more readily on the administrative efficiency side and then, after engagement, there is recognition and a bit of a shift to more of the pedagogically innovative uses.

PM: That also makes sense and ties in again with the strategy doesn't it, where it's pedagogy driven and problem driven rather than this completely top down approach, it has to make sense to the person who is using it.

NT: Absolutely, and it has to address an issue that they are facing or it has to enhance their practice in some way, if it doesn't do that then why do we have it? Obviously there is a real belief that it does, but that just can't be "this is how it shall be done", you have to engage in the conversations around what people's concerns are and how this can potentially address it. And if it doesn't then we have to find ways that it can.

PM: Looking forward and thinking about more traditional ideas of e-learning and the potential for distance learning, as far as I know we have at least two completely online courses at the moment, do you think there is the possibility for more? Is there evidence that this form of teaching and learning works? I think the strategy again said again 'a completely online course remains an interesting challenge'!

NT: I think it does work, I think it has to be appropriate for the subject though, I there are some subject areas where it will always remain a challenge. Trying to take something that is a real challenge to deliver in a completely online fashion and morph it into something that can be delivered completely online has the potential to lose the essence of what it was in the first place, but being cognisant of that as a risk, there are a lot of subjects where it is completely possible to be delivered entirely online successfully. I think it is a challenge because engaging in the creation of a

completely online course requires you to change your conception of pedagogy and turn it on its head, aside from trying to sit and structure a course so far in advance, because it all has to line up, just the undertaking of that is one thing, but I think you also have to think very differently about pedagogy to engage in that.

Having gone through that process myself, it changed the way I delivered F2F teaching as well. So again I think there is huge benefit to having engaged in that process, and I suggest that there most likely is for others as well, but it is a massive undertaking and people need to be supported in that exploration and undertaking. And it is incredibly resource intensive so I think that the challenge is that initially when learning technology was being implemented across higher education, it was seen as the great hope for being able to offer massive amounts of provision with very little resource and that's a complete misnomer, in fact it needs more resource I would suggest in terms of staff time. So I think that this as the solution to some of the squeezes that higher education is experiencing is not the case. But what it does do is it opens up access to higher education to a wider range of people in a more flexible way, so you break down barriers of geography, you break down barriers of schedule and I think that the potential it has in this regard is what we should be focusing on. So if there are courses that we feel are appropriately delivered completely online and can have benefit in terms of reaching a wider geographically spread group of people or people who would not normally be able to access something that is more structured because of time commitments etc then those are the ones I think we should be pursuing, I think there is good potential for it, but it does take investment and it's not a money saver – I think that that's the key.

PM: As you say, that's the concern, that we see the more tangible side to what we do as being something that can be replaced...

NT: Exactly, I mean, what I would say as I am thinking through it, is what it can be a saver on is facilities, but not staff time. But then you save on real facilities but have to invest more in your virtual estate and I guess, depending on the scale at which one undertakes these things, you could actually save quite a bit by investing more on virtual estate because I would suggest it is probably less expensive than a physical estate. But again I would think that there probably hasn't been enough in looking at the investment needed for both and what the costs and implications are, but it is certainly not a saver in terms of staff time. I can completely understand how people who are given the same provision as face to face (F2F) actually struggle to deliver an online course as it does require more. And it requires more, or maybe just different underpinning support but the institution probably isn't set up incredibly well to provide that because we are more geared towards F2F delivery. So there are challenges and it would take some good strategic planning if the Institution did want to move more fully in that direction.

PM: I think that covers all my questions, fantastic, thanks!

NT: So you're now going to come up with solutions to all these problems I hope!

PM: Er...! (Laughs).